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The Wind's Will

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THE WIND'S WILL

THE WIND'S WILL

BY

ALBERT BRITT

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MOFFAT, YARD AND COMPANY
1912

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" For a boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

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THE WIND'S WILL

CHAPTER I

THE WOMAN BY THE ROADSIDE

THERE were two events that stood out prominently in the first twelve years of Christopher Dunham's life. The first was his discovery that money, in addition to being a useful medium of exchange, is also a standard of value and the product of the sweat of somebody's brow, either the owner's or someone subject to the owner's suasion, moral or otherwise. If it hadn't been for this first event, it is doubtful if the woman would have found the time, the place, and Christopher properly conjoined when she came driving down the road that led past the "store" and so out to the prairie, beyond which lay the rest of the world. And the coming of the woman was the second event.

Christopher wanted a bicycle, one of the improved pneumatic-tired, diamond-framed, unattainable kind of safeties on which the Terrible Swede, Little Jimmy Michaels, and Jack Swinton, the county champion, rode to victory. Christo-

pher's father had never been known to turn his face away from any of the ordinary necessities of boyhood, but a bicycle was real money. Therefore, he made Christopher the first financial proposal that young American had ever received.

"Bicycles cost a lot of money, son," said his astute father, "and I don't see what good it will be on Illinois roads, but I'll tell you what I'll do. You cut all the thistles in the pasture, and I'll buy you a bicycle. And mind you tell me if you find any Canadians. Salt's the only thing that will do the business for a Canadian."

Christopher considered the situation gravely. Cutting thistles was usually a function of Bill, the hired man — as one of the light tasks with which farmers beguile their helpers into thinking that they are resting on rainy days and between more important matters, such as harvesting and threshing. This phase of the situation presented itself to Christopher. What would become of Bill if the prime occupation of his leisure hours was thus wrested from him? Would he not be taking the bread from the mouth of an honest workingman? And would not the entire social fabric be seriously shaken by this blow at its foundation stone — the inalienable right of every man in his job? Not all the ramifications of the subject were clear in Christopher's mind, but he was sure, at least, that his undertaking some of Bill's staple duties was a serious matter.

Christopher's father merely laughed when this

view of the matter was solemnly laid before him by the boy.

"Never you mind, young man. I'll take care of Bill. If worst comes to worst, I'll make him foreman of thistle-cutting and set him to watching you. If you want a bicycle, you'll have to make it."

"But I don't want to make it; I want to buy it. They keep just the kind I want at Stimson's."

"Right you are. And the way for you to make a bicycle for the man who sells them to Mr. Stimson is to shoulder your hoe and march down into the pasture." And Christopher departed, much mystified but still confident enough in his father's wisdom to trust it to gather a bicycle from thistles.

Now cutting thistles is hard work if you once admit to yourself that it is work at all. But if each thistle is an Indian or a wolf or a bad man, the problem becomes far simpler. To be sure much time is wasted in crawling carefully up behind a stump in order to surprise a large camp of Indians buried in slumber, or in running madly for a tree to escape a peculiarly ill-tempered timber wolf, afterwards sneaking back stealthily to catch him unawares while he is rending large pieces of bloody flesh from a fat buck he has just pulled down, but anything that adds pleasure to work is quite worth while for its own sake, even if it reduces the per capita performance of the things in hand.

Then in addition to the slaughter of Indians

and wolves, varied with occasional stalking of deer or giraffe, when one happened upon an extra large mullein stalk, there was the frequent necessity of rest when one could lie on his back on the soft grass and watch the clouds sailing over and wonder about where they came from and whether they were real thunder caps and what a thunder cap was and what a fine thing it would be to step out of a balloon and climb around on that biggest one of all.

There was that old coal mine in the west pasture where a gray fox once lived. No one had seen the fox, but skeptics had only to be shown the hole into the mine, almost large enough for a small cat to crawl through, to be immediately convinced. On the hill back of the coal mine a house once stood and an apple tree or two still marked the site. The apples were small and sour, but after you had worried down eight or ten you knew you had eaten something, which is always a satisfaction.

Still farther on was the hazel brush where his father once came upon a real wolf eating a real pig. It was some years before, and the wolf was clearly a stranger in the neighborhood, and had been shot within a week after the affair with the pig, but Christopher would not have removed the atmosphere that hung around the wooded hollow for a crate of bicycles. To stand on the very spot and peer cautiously about and imagine various creepy imaginings was almost as good as being a

pioneer with a flintlock musket and a cabin full of ragged children to protect.

Those were a few of the by-occupations that lightened the labor of cutting thistles. Christopher was beginning to think that making bicycles wasn't such an unattractive industry after all. At the exact moment when the woman came down the road and into this story he was over the fence by the roadside in a battle to the death with Red-eyed Mike of Roaring Gulch, Mike being an especially sturdy, wide-spreading cockle-burr with roots like iron. Christopher was darting in and out and dealing deadly blows with his hoe and uttering sharp cries of rage and satisfaction through his clenched teeth.

Suddenly the rattle of wheels smote through the mist of battle that enveloped him and he turned to behold the woman. She sat on the back seat of a surrey, evidently a "livery-rig" from the indifferent slouching pose of the driver on the front seat. A man sat beside her, but Christopher was only dimly aware of him and had no occasion to remember him until long afterwards. The woman held his eyes, but he saw only that she was beautiful, with a beauty that was new to him. Good looks in that land of hard work and plain living, where "dressing up" and feeling miserable were synonymous terms, were usually associated with the freshness of youth and ceased to be of great importance when one had attained the dignity of matrimony.

But this woman was as undeniably beautiful as

she was unquestionably far past youth and its freshness. That much he felt rather than knew. Then he dropped his eyes and dug a hole in the ground with his bare toe and wished he could crawl into it and hide. He, a boy, had been caught red-handed at the game of being a man and his boyish soul was shamed.

He felt her eyes upon him and the color crept up under his tan and freckles.

Then she spoke. "What is your name, my boy?"

Christopher raised his eyes again and the strange feeling came to him that hers was more than the ordinary curiosity of townfolks who delighted to embarrass bashful country boys. She asked as though she really wanted to know and had some genuine reason back of her question.

"Christopher Dunham, ma'am."

"And your father? Is he living?"

"Yes, ma'am," wonder beginning to conquer even his bashfulness.

The woman's level gaze was upon him, but he felt himself growing cool and steady as though he braced his boyish body for a struggle. For the first time in his life something stirred within him that was not memory, but which yet seemed akin to it. Christopher had never heard of subliminal consciousness, and he could not have defined it if he had, but the thing that was struggling in his mind was none the less very perplexing. It was absurd that he should ever have seen this woman

before, but somewhere in the depths of him something stirred at the look of her and the sound of her voice. Never among the quiet, hard-working farmers' wives of his acquaintance had he known anyone like her, yet she provoked in him a new feeling of restlessness that was half longing and half repulsion.

"Did you ever see me before?" The woman leaned toward him to ask the question, as though she both hoped for and feared the answer. Her manner, kind, encouraging, almost companionable, her voice low and pleasant but clear, gave him courage. He looked her straight in the eyes and the strange feeling stirred again in his brain. But his straightforward mind could not put words to anything so fleeting and formless and he answered as he thought, directly and simply:

"No, ma'am."

"Never? Think hard. Did you ever see this before?" and she dangled a tiny watch, set with white stones that flashed in the sun before his eyes. Its brilliancy held him and he answered more slowly but still in the negative.

"Did you ever hear your — your father speak of Mrs. Burroughs?"

This time he was sure of his ground. The name was like nothing in the category of his acquaintances and his "No" came promptly.

"Never heard it in all your life?"

"No, I never heard it."

The woman sank back in her seat and the in-

terest faded from her face. She half turned to the man who sat beside her:

"It's absurd, of course, but do you think it's at all possible? He should be about this one's age and the eyes, the face, the voice,— it's all there. If it wasn't so impossible."

The man made a gesture of good-natured impatience.

"Nonsense, mother. You've got that man on your brain. The boy's as hopelessly lost as Charley Ross. And what difference does it make? He had the right to do as he pleased with the boy. What would you do if your wild guess were right?"

"Nothing," and she dropped her hands into her lap with an air of abandoning a hard problem. "Nothing, but we should know, anyway, and that would be something."

The man laughed. "Upon my soul, mother, if you had been Eve, you would have cut down the tree to find out what made the apples grow. Eating just one would have been only a nice beginning for you. Let's get on. That train won't wait for us. If the boy's alive, he'll come out of his hole when the time comes, and if he isn't"— a shrug of his shoulders finished the sentence.

The boy watched them as the surrey creaked along the dusty road until a little hill hid them from him. Even then he stood staring at the notch in his horizon line where they had disap-

peared. Not for years afterwards was he able to analyze his thoughts — or rather his bewilderment. He had seen many things before that he could not understand, but his ignorance in those other cases was simply a dead, blank barrier that he hoped sometime to see over or clamber around. Now he was facing a wall with chinks in it through which he caught flashes of light — nothing substantial or real — only amorphous visions that merely suggested instead of bodying forth life and action.

Older men than he had puzzled over that strange freak of the brain that holds up to view vague, shifting figures, only to snatch them away before we have tied them down and given them a name and a place. Had he been one of those older ones, he might have reasoned learnedly with himself about the subliminal self, the operations of the law of association of ideas, or even perhaps have dipped into occult lore and probed fearsomely into the possibilities of reincarnation. But being only a boy, he had no command of high-sounding terms with which to conceal from himself the profundity of his own ignorance.

He had never seen either the man or the woman before—of that he was sure, yet something in the woman's look and voice spoke to something in him that struggled vainly to answer.

The zest was gone out of his game; life had departed from the weedy, sunsmitten pasture. Aimlessly he wandered through the still, yellow haze

of the afternoon, striking here and there at insolent, purple-blossomed thistles that were thistles only now and no longer Indians or bold, black-bearded bad men or ravening wolves.

That night, after many false starts, he put his wonder into words. His father sat smoking on the narrow front porch, and inside, Hilda, the Swedish hired girl, chanted sadly over her supper dishes. Christopher sat on the lower step of the porch with his chin in his hands, and sought for words in which to crystallize the curious problem that weighed upon him.

"Dad, what does it mean when you know that you know something you don't know?"

His father smiled quizzically at the question.

"Well, son, I should say that it meant indigestion or a leaning toward higher criticism."

Christopher saw a new lead and pounced upon it. "What's higher criticism, then?"

His father laughed outright. "You have me there, son. Usually though, I think, a higher critic is a chap who says that all the things you think are nonsense and offers you a new brand of nonsense to take the place of the things you think are sense."

This was very baffling and unsatisfactory to a small mind groping for the solution of a problem it could not state clearly. But his father's queer and mystifying command of awe-inspiring words suggested a new mystery that suddenly presented

itself to him as having a possible relation to his experience of the afternoon.

"Father!" with sudden emphasis.

"Yes, son."

"Where did we come from?"

The blunt question, apparently so easy of answer, had at least the merit of arousing his father from the lethargic comfort into which Hilda's good supper had thrown him. His pipe came from between his lips now and he sat upright.

"Why, what do you mean, boy? Where did we come from?"

"Yes. We haven't lived here always, have we?"

The father parried the boy's question with another, studying the small, earnest face meanwhile. "What makes you think we haven't?"

This time it was the boy who evaded. "Oh, lots of things. You don't talk like other people for one thing. Then the books you read. Nobody else has them and nobody else can talk about the things you do. And then — well, anyway you're different. And you make me be different. Other people don't care how their children talk, except, of course, that they won't let 'em swear — if they know it —" with a commendable effort at entire truthfulness.

"Doc Owens says you're the best educated man he knows and the preacher sets — sits — and talks to you by the hour. And they don't know half

the things you do either. Where did you learn it all?"

The father was on his feet now and pacing up and down the narrow space of the porch. His hands were clenched behind his back, his fingers closely interlaced, and his teeth were set hard on the stem of his pipe. The boy watched him stride to and fro, and the look of wonder deepened on his face. Back and forth, back and forth, the man tramped, his chin on his breast and his forehead drawn together until the space between his eyes was narrowed to a line. The boy sat and watched him, scarcely breathing. For some reason he could not know, the question he had flung into the still pool of his father's memory had sent forth widening ripples of anxiety — perplexity even. The minutes passed as the two wrestled each in his own way — the one with his ignorance, the other perhaps with his knowledge. The occasion seemed slight enough on the face of it, but the stuff of tragedy is often woven from the flimsiest materials of every day.

Neither knew how long they remained thus, poised on the brink of the world-old conflict between youth and age, youth striving to wrest the precious fruits of knowledge from the hands of age before boyish appetite has learned the hard lessons of judgment and discretion.

The pacing of the older man came to an end and he faced the boy with his shoulders squared, and an attempt at lightness in his tone.

"How long have you been thinking of these things, Chris? And how have you happened to speak of them to-night?"

"Oh, I've known for a long time that we were different, somehow, but I haven't thought much about it till this afternoon."

"And why this afternoon?"

The boy drew a long breath, and then came his story. The father heard him through, his eyes on the boy's face, his hands clenched again behind his back. The slow monotone of Hilda's sad Swedish chant made a dull background to the boy's picture of the woman who had come down the road and paused to throw the first shadow of doubt across his life, and then vanished again over the hill. It was as though the placid fates that were measuring and clipping the garment of his life in commonplace pattern had been pushed aside for one vivid instant by one who had knowledge of a more complex and difficult design in which a greater destiny had intended that the garment should be woven.

It was a short story and when Christopher had finished he glanced up timidly, half expecting grave reproof for furnishing so little fire to justify the smoke he had raised. But there was no reproof in his father's eyes — only grave concern. Again he resumed his pacing to and fro, but only for two or three turns.

"Which way did you say they went?" he asked as he halted.

"Toward Yorkville. The man said something about catching a train."

"Then they're not coming back?" There was relief in the man's voice.

"I don't know. They didn't say anything about it. Why? Do you want to see her?"

"Oh, not specially. I just thought if people were going around the country putting queer ideas into small boys' heads and egging them on to pester their poor old fathers with their hard questions, someone ought to do something about it, that's all."

"But, father, where *did* we come from? You haven't told me that."

The man made a gesture of good-humored impatience. "Chris, you're worse than a cockleburr. There's nothing mysterious about us. We came out here from Pennsylvania when you were a bit of a shaver — three or four years old — and we've lived here ever since. As for my tremendous learning, there's nothing mysterious about that either. My father intended me for a lawyer, and sent me to college. But I was lazy, and spent more time reading the books I liked than in studying what my professors thought I ought to like. The consequence was that I barely scraped through to my diploma and I balked absolutely at the idea of chaining myself down to three years of Blackstone and making a living for the rest of my life off the quarrels of my neighbors. Then my father died, and I took my share of his estate and came

out here and settled down. I haven't made much of a fortune, but I've kept out of jail and I've never helped anyone else to get in. And there you are."

Christopher sat silent. He was answered, but not entirely. It was not that he doubted his father's word, but grown men have a way of bridging over wide gaps in the narrative with a word or a wave of the hand where the inquiring mind of a small boy wants to see every step of the way. He had a suspicion that his problem was being trifled with and he pondered the mathematics of the situation.

"How old are you, father?"

"Nearly fifty, son," and the man touched his gray hair with humorous sadness. "I'm getting to be an old man fast."

"And I was four years old when we came out here?"

The father saw the drift of the questions, but it was too late to stop it. "Yes." He spoke barely above a whisper.

"That makes ten — no, nine — years ago, don't — doesn't it?"

"Yes," again the whispered monosyllable.

"And people are generally young when they graduate from college, aren't they?"

"Generally." The man raged at himself inwardly for not suspecting that the boy's alert mind would detect the hiatus in the narrative.

"How old were you when you graduated?"

The questioner was relentless as a Grand Inquisitor.

"Twenty-two, I think. Yes, twenty-two."

"But you haven't told me anything about the time between. Where were you then?"

"Chris, Chris, do you doubt my word?"

"No, father, but — but I want to know."

"There's nothing to know, son. I tried a number of things, my father's business, loafing, knocking about — doing many things and nothing well. Most of the time I was fussing around the garden and orchard and pretending to manage one of my father's farms."

"And then you married my mother?"

The man brought his hands sharply together behind his back and into his face came the look of one suddenly stricken by a rough hand. Nurses in hospitals know that look and lawyers and judges have seen it in the courtroom. It comes only to those who have felt the twinge of a wound — of the body or the soul. For a full minute he stood and stared straight ahead with such an expression of dumb agony in his eyes that even the boy saw it and was sorry.

When the man spoke again his voice was hard and husky.

"Yes, then I married your mother! Your mother!" He smote his hands together in front of him. "Great God, boy, have you no mercy? Why do you torment me with these questions?"

The man's sudden burst of passionate sorrow

struck the boy dumb and ashamed. He could not say he was sorry. The ordinary words of apology were too small for such a crisis, and he could only sit still and tremble at the sight of his quiet, self-controlled father so torn by emotions and thoughts that were beyond his boyish understanding.

By degrees the man's passion subsided and he turned to the boy with a laugh that came from dry lips. "I'm sorry, my boy. I didn't mean to break out in that violent way, but you hurt me horribly.

"There, there, son, don't take it to heart," as tears gathered in the boy's eyes despite his sturdy efforts to keep them in. "It's all right. A man has troubles that a boy can't understand, and I know you didn't mean to hurt me."

Now it was the man who was ashamed. "Sometime, I'll tell you the whole story, when you're old enough to understand it and I'm old enough to behave better over it. That woman's got on my nerves, I guess. We don't know her, Chris, and she doesn't know us. You reminded her of someone she used to know, and like a woman, she scented a mystery. As though there could be anything mysterious about a plain Illinois farmer and his freckle-faced son." This time the laugh came more easily and the boy ventured to smile mistily in response.

"Come, Chris, let's forget her. And now it's time small boys and old men were in bed, if the

thistles and bicycles of the world are to be attended to properly."

Chris rose obediently and marched upstairs to bed and to sleep that not even strange problems and fugitive glimpses of things that he thought he knew and knew he didn't know had power to disturb.

CHAPTER II

THE FOLLIES OF YOUTH

IT was not an easy task for Christopher to forget the woman by the road. For many days she was uppermost in his waking thoughts and vague suggestions of her flitted though his dreams. More than once his father eyed him with worried solicitude as he sat on the steps of the porch in the evening with his small chin propped on his hands and his eyes staring unseeingly at the ground. Little by little, however, the memory of the strange woman grew dim, until she remained only as an occasional misty background to his wandering, boyish thoughts of life, and himself and his ambitions for the future.

Little by little, too, his wonder about his father died down. If a mystery was wrapped in those intervening years between his father's graduation from college and his own birth it rather increased than diminished his boyish affection and respect. It became only an additional reason to distinguish his learned father from their hard-working, commonplace neighbors — a veil of romance to shroud the plainness of their lives.

To be sure he never spoke of it to his schoolmates, but it was none the less a source of satis-

faction and pride, more to be cherished as a mark of family distinction than a funeral or the arrival of a new baby in less fortunate families.

So, too, the older man's superior knowledge became an accepted fact, so that it was no cause of surprise when his father turned to him one evening and asked suddenly:

"Chris, how would you like to go to college?"

Would he like to go to college? What a question! He knew the college with its high-arched elms lining the broad walk up to the old Main Hall that was sacred with the veneration that belongs to a half-century of useful existence. He had seen the students, too, boys and girls, wonderfully gay and sophisticated and fashionable to his country mind, some of the boys very impressive in their gray cadet uniforms. He knew that a real army officer was sent by the United States Government to make citizen soldiers of them, and the drill on the campus that he had seen once had seemed to him beyond compare. He had heard from his father of West Point and of the machine-like perfection of the cadet battalion there, and the same infallible authority had told him of the traditions of bravery on a thousand battlefields that hung over the Gordon Highlanders and the Black Hussars, but they were only names, high-sounding, but dulled by distance, while the Schuyler Cadets were a very present and tangible reality.

He had no particularly clear idea of the history

and performances of the Old Guard, but if he had been given his choice he would unhesitatingly have chosen to enroll himself among these Illinois youngsters in the tight-fitting gray blouses. To die at Waterloo was all very fine for those who had an eye on history, but to live and march before the admiring crowds in the Decoration Day parade was much more to the point for a young man who wanted martial glory and life at the same time. And now he was to be given a chance to take his place among those sturdy defenders of their country's flag and to sit at the feet of gray professors in dim old lecture halls and learn perhaps in time as much as his father knew. The best part of it all would be the coming home occasionally, grave, reserved, well-dressed, and deeply versed in all the fashionable lore of the college town, to impress the girls and irritate the boys with whom he had played at school and who probably still regarded themselves as his equals.

So it was settled. Schuyler was to be the college, of course. Harvard and Yale and Princeton were all very well for the pampered sons of millionaires, but the humble scion of a hard-handed farmer — even though a mystery hung about that farmer's life — could not better fit himself for his life's battle than in the college which pious, canny pioneers had founded with prayer and shrewd investment in virgin prairie land.

It is no part of this narrative to follow in detail the experiences of Christopher in all the years

of his prep. school and college life. Seven of them there were in all and every one a year of growth and activity. Ambitious he had been when he entered, but it was the ambition of a child who sees the future as a series of heroic pictures with himself always the central figure. For this harmless diversion of his leisure hours Christopher came gradually to substitute a definite desire for specific achievement.

At that time and in that obscure corner of the educational world old ideals of scholarship still prevailed. At the head of the college was an old man, short of stature but with a great head and heart, who had borne a worthy part in the making of the Commonwealth, but whose proudest boast was that he had been a friend of Lincoln, the immortal. His most cherished piece of furniture was a hat rack that had stood in the hall of Lincoln's house at Springfield, and the first time that Christopher saw the interior of the president's house the old man made him hang his hat on the hook where Lincoln had been wont to place his and then lean over and peer into the triangular mirror in the middle of the rack as had been the absent-minded habit of the Emancipator.

Besides the old president, there was the great triumvirate of veterans, graduates of the college in its early days, who had each given almost half a century of unselfish service to its upbuilding and to the upbuilding of the young manhood and womanhood that brought fresh life to the old halls

every autumn. Great men were they in every essential quality, save that their greatness had no shadowy reflection in income. Like Agassiz, whose pupil one of them had been for a few never-forgotten months of graduate study, they had no time to make money.

These men set the pace for the thought of the college; in their lives was crystallized the philosophy of the institution. Even self-confident young professors who came to Schuyler fresh from research in the libraries and laboratories of universities which were seeking to buy traditions as sextons strive to force the English ivy to grow in the dry prairie air, were soon made to feel the influence of these obscure great men, who had made much manhood and womanhood but little money, and were at once subdued and exalted by it. The boys and girls who were plunged fresh-souled and impressionable into this atmosphere, where principles were held as standards of daily life and not as so many relics to be exhibited on occasions of public rejoicing as the bones of a saint are brought to view on his natal day, could not help breathing it into their minds as they breathed in the oxygen and hydrogen of the air.

Some of them, to be sure, came from homes more sophisticated and skeptical than the average, and affected to scoff at the Spartan simplicity and high idealism of Schuyler. Others came under its influence only for a time, to have its effect worn away by the hard scourging of necessity when

the college lay behind them. Others there were, however, who never lost it and for whom the vision of the great triumvirate of teachers with the little old man who had been a friend of Lincoln in their midst never faded.

To Christopher his entrance into Schuyler was the realization of his dreams. The idealism which his father had nourished carefully, the hunger for achievement and advancement which had been growing with the growth of his mind and body, found here its fit and proper food. Each year saw him more of an idealist, a more ardent believer in the divine power of service and sacrifice to bring back the youth of the world, less patient with the theory that makes money the concomitant of all good as its love is the root of all evil. He stood high in his classes, but not too high; his sound body and active disposition made him athletic but not an athlete in anything approaching the semi-professional sense to which the term is often degraded; above all, he was definitely and constantly conscious of the spiritual side of his nature without being professedly religious.

And so at twenty, in the middle of his sophomore year, he surprised himself, his friends, and above all his father, by falling in love with an actress. She was not much of an actress, to be sure, but Christopher thought he was very much in love, and never having had a secret in his life except

the mystery of his father's lost years, he was utterly open and shameless. Night after night found him well down in the front of the little theater where she was playing "leads" in the stock company that had found temporary rest for its feet and a slight easing of its treasurer's troubles in the town of Chatham. He had not had the courage yet to send flowers to her on the stage by an usher in the approved metropolitan fashion, but he carried them to her hotel in the afternoons and hung around the lobby in the hope of seeing her. To meet her and speak to her was beyond his wildest hopes, but the impossible happened in the most natural way in the world.

Encouraged by the rising tide of real money that flowed into the box office the manager determined to tempt fate and perhaps conquer fortune with a production of "The Soudan" with a full equipment of soldiers, horses and Fuzzies. But this required a small army of supers and the local manager confided to one or two of his acquaintances among the more dashing of the college boys that if eighteen or twenty academic aspirants for the buskin would present themselves at the stage door on a certain afternoon, "there'd be something doing."

Christopher's state of mind was matter for current gossip and crude humor at the college, and he was one of the chosen. The noise and tumult of the play, the glare of the footlights, the applause

that came from the dim cave beyond the band of brillant light at the front of the stage, were nothing to him.

His eyes saw only a woman's face with a tip-tilted nose, a saucy mouth, and a dimple that came and went inconstantly as the moon peeping from behind clouds. The imagery is Christopher's, who rashly committed it to paper in somewhat shaky rhyme. When it was resurrected from the bottom of a bureau drawer a year later, he felt much as a man does when suddenly confronted with an unpaid bill a year overdue.

But to return to the play! Christopher was a soldier of the Queen in a red coat two sizes too large for him. His trousers were his own, as the wardrobe of the theater did not provide for the legs of supes whose places were well in the background. He was armed with a double-barreled, breech-loading shotgun, whose most sanguinary use hitherto had been the slaughter of ducks. But what were clothes or arms or scenery or applause to him? Marie was on the same stage with him and sometimes only an arm's length away.

It should be mentioned that her name on the billboards was Marie Lenholme.

The end of the play came much too soon and when she, the divine she, came off after the last curtain, Christopher was standing in the wings blocking her way to the dressing room she shared

with the other women of the company. She stopped her rush abruptly and stared.

"Well!" she demanded, in a tone of hostility.

Christopher reddened and his hands shook, but he stood his ground. "Miss Lenholme," he said in an unsteady voice, "I've often — I've seen — I mean I want to tell you how much I admire your acting. I — I — think you're splendid!"

It was a very youthful speech and it was absurd to tremble so over it, but he meant it, and more. The girl looked at him curiously. Hers had been the hard life of the barnstormer, at home in many cities and towns and homeless in all. The stage-door Johnny was not new to her and she was well able to protect herself against his approaches or to meet him on his own ground and defeat him by her knowledge of the world and her frank use of it.

But this boy was no stage-door Johnny. His sincerity was as plain as his youth.

"I've wanted to tell you how much I like your acting," Christopher went on, a little more bravely now, "but this is the first chance I've had."

"Thank you. I wish a few more people felt the same way."

"Oh, I'm sure they do. I know they do."

The girl shrugged her rounded shoulders.

"Then they're mighty close-mouthed about it." She moved as though to push by him.

"Miss Lenholme,"— hurriedly — "I want —

won't you — can't I — Oh, I mean. I'd like to come and see you. May I?"

The simple, innocent, respectful directness of this boyish appeal to the child of the stage, one of the tawdry playthings of the world, was matter for laughter or tears indifferently. It moved Marie to neither, only to a slow smile.

"Of course. If you want to come, you may. Any afternoon you like. My daylight engagements are not numerous, except for rehearsal. If I'm at the theater, I won't be at the hotel, and if I ain't I will be."

With which cryptic utterance she brushed by him and vanished through the door of the narrow, crowded dressing room. Christopher slipped out of his overgrown red coat and into his ordinary clothes, but his ordinary self was leagues away. Presumably he touched the sidewalk occasionally on his way to his room, but he was not conscious of it. Nor was he much more aware of undressing and tumbling into bed. Falling asleep was even more of an indeterminate process than usual, so easily did he shade off from thoughts of his divinity to dreams of her. The next morning he was disquieted to discover that he had slept so soundly and so long that the first bell for eight o'clock recitations was ringing, and nothing but long practice in the art of hurried dressing and the shortness of the walk to the college saved him from the fate of the foolish virgins.

Through the recitation "Marie — this after-

noon — this afternoon — Marie" ran like a soft undercurrent to the drone of students' voices and the occasional sharper snap of the professor's questions. If he had been called on, nothing could have saved him from blank failure. Chapel pulled him together a little with its quieter atmosphere of reverence and inspiration and he made his stumbling way through the duties of the morning, shaving disaster two or three times, but never meeting it.

Then it was noon and the day's work was done. Dinner at the boarding club lasted for a full week that day and after two or three eternities and a couple of æons had passed and been forgotten it was two o'clock. Two o'clock, and she said any afternoon! That could mean nothing but this afternoon and this very hour. Questions of calling etiquette and dress bothered him little. If it had been evening, he might have longed for a dress suit, but in Chatham what one wore in the morning one wore in the afternoon. The frock coat was the symbol of Sabbath peace and discomfort, unless one happened to be a minister making his parochial calls, a young lawyer trying his first case in court, or a seller of patent medicines.

So Christopher gave his hair an extra dab with the brush, slapped at the collar of his coat with a whisk broom, eyed his shoes doubtfully, and set forth. Three times he walked past the door of the hotel before he found the courage to go in.

He gave his name at the desk in a voice that seemed to resent being torn loose from the soles of his shoes, and he burned for physical revenge on the clerk for the wink with which that worthy favored him.

"Going up to see Lenholme, eh?" with a knowing leer. Christopher could only nod. "Got past the flower stage? Well, well, I was young once myself. I know how it is."

The clerk could boast of at least four more years than Christopher, but the fashion and glitter of hotel life in an Illinois town soon turn the wine of pleasure sour and bring gray hairs and wrinkles on the temperament of the most buoyant. Christopher longed to slay the clerk or walk away from him, but pride held him chained at the desk with a poor assumption of nonchalance until his name should elicit some response from his inamorata.

The clerk held on with his airy badinage. "You college fellows are the gay dogs, though. Six or seven a day to see Lenholme. And fruit and flowers and candy! Oh, my! Yes, sir. Room with bath? Yes, sir. Twenty-five. Front! Yes, sir! Supper at six-thirty." He turned back from the rotund traveling man, whom he had thus labeled and ticketed and passed on, to the more congenial task of torturing Christopher. "Let's see, you're the fourth — no, the fifth to-day. But she wouldn't see 'em — not a one of 'em. Nothing but the coin goes with

her kind. If you haven't got a good roll to flash on her right at the start, you might as well run along and sell your papers."

The reappearance of a bell-boy brought the torture to an end.

"This way. A hundred and one's her number. Two flights up and turn to the right," and even the bell-boy winked knowingly at Christopher as the latter turned towards the stairs.

His blood was hot as he toiled upward. So this was the sort of treatment she was exposed to, was it? If her guests were so insulted, what about herself? Must her life be such a dreary desert of insult and innuendo? He did not know that the hotel clerk was yet to be born who would insult Marie Lenholme twice — and most of them paused long before the first attempt after one good look at her scornful eyes. Christopher paused outside Room 101 and knocked timidly.

"Come in." The voice was tired; the intonation flat and languid, and the scene that the opening of the door revealed like anything but the dainty pink and gold boudoir that his fancy had created. It was the ordinary bare, cheerless, steam-heated hotel parlor with four dingy plush-covered chairs, a marble topped oval center table, and three or four cheap prints on the walls. Strewn on two of the chairs were various articles of woman's apparel; a pair of battered, run-down shoes stood by a half-open door through which appeared the disorder of a bedroom whose

occupant has so few clothes that it is hardly worth while keeping them in order.

By the window sat "Lenholme" in a bedraggled skirt, whose dinginess matched the plush on the chairs, and a grimy, pink dressing sacque. Her feet were thrust into worn bedroom slippers and her body drooped listlessly with the weariness of utter exhaustion, mental and physical.

She glanced over her shoulder as Christopher stood on the threshold. At sight of him her smile flashed out, the dimple twinkled, and in the radiance of the quizzical look she threw him Christopher's eyes were blinded to the dinginess of the room, the petticoat on the chair, and the disarray that was visible in the bedroom beyond. And that mass of reddish hair! Nothing could obscure its glory and no amount of tousling take from its charm.

She clapped her hands softly like a pleased child. "Why, it's the little boy in the red coat. Who'd have thought you'd remember poor little me? Do come in and sit down, if you don't mind throwing a few rags on the floor."

Christopher stood dumb before this welcome. Was this the hard, half-defiant woman who had confronted him in the wings the night before, or the sulky, tired girl his eyes had fallen on when he opened the door? This was a sprite, a tawdry, tousled Puck, a Pierrette minus the domino.

"Oh, come in, come in. I don't eat little boys, at least not when they're good." And the smile

flashed on him and the dimple danced out for an instant.

"I was afraid you might be engaged. Other callers — somebody might — you're so — you know so many people."

"Know so many people? I?" She pointed to herself with a sweeping gesture. "Why, I don't know a soul in this whole town except the rest of the company and Berkfield at the theater. And I don't want to know them any more than I have to, either, I can tell you. You're the first real human person I've seen to talk to since I asked a policeman the way to the Pennsylvania Ferry in New York. If I ever get back to Broadway, I won't thank anyone to show me the way out of town."

The clerk's tale of the shoals of callers that beset her every day was only high-class fiction then. Christopher's spirits rose. He had come in fear and trembling to pay court to a great lady and to be jostled by the throng of her admirers, and he found a lonesome, homesick girl in a faded pink dressing sacque with a dimple that came and went without warning and a crown of red hair.

It is no matter what they talked about, harmless, foolish, empty prattle of youth. She told him of the hardships of her life, lightly and disconnectedly, and he listened with grave face and the presumptuous wish in his heart that he were able to take her out of it. That was harmless enough too. If a man were to be held responsible

for all the foolish messages that his heart sends to his brain between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five, the court of heaven would be continually occupied with the trial of unconscious breaches of implied promises.

Then she talked of Broadway, where fame and damnation wait side by side, and one is sometimes mistaken for the other, so close is their resemblance; of the lure of the lights, the rush and glitter of the gay crowds at night when the theaters are emptying and the blue vault of heaven resounds with the clang of trolley gongs, the honk of automobile horns, and the cries of hopeful cab-drivers.

"Oh, it's heaven, I tell you, just heaven, to play on Broadway. I was there once in a show that lasted a week. Then the manager's backer decided that he'd rather lose his money on horse races where they set a new piece every afternoon, and we were lucky to get our week's salary. If I ever get back there, I'll stay if I have to do skirt dances and sell souvenir programmes between the acts."

Christopher didn't understand quite, but he sympathized. The great city drew him, too, but it was not of Broadway and its lights that he dreamed. To each one New York spells something different, but her answer to the eager questionings of all — idealists and money maniacs, workers and lotus-eaters — is often the same. She is the Sphinx of the New World, young as

the nation that has built her, old as human passion and greed and pity and remorse.

Something of this was in Christopher's mind as he walked back to his room late in the afternoon. Marie Lenholme baffled and charmed him. Sophisticated far beyond his comprehension in many things, she had the naïveté of a child in others. Where he moved slowly and seriously, she danced along with light step and careless glance. Perhaps where he would go steadily and with unfaltering tread, she might shrink back and cling to him. He was beginning to hope so.

The next day found him again at her feet, and the next and the next, each time with greater confidence. The fourth day was Sunday and he took heart from her carelessly gracious reception of him and asked her for a walk. Brave with the unashamed courage of innocent youth, he led her down Main Street and up to the campus. Slowly they paced along the elm-arched walks, speaking little and then of nothing important. Christopher's heart was big with a sense of a coming crisis in his life. What was in Marie's no one knows; perhaps she saw a crisis coming in her life too.

Courage has its disadvantages and the man who violates the canons of his class and community will have many hours of remorse in private. Also the wireless telegraphy of bad news brings punishment fast on the heels of sin. When Christopher returned to his room after dinner on Monday

wondering what he could do to hurry the time around to two o'clock, he found his father sitting by the table and eyeing the text-books on which dust had begun to gather. Nemesis had arrived on schedule time.

CHAPTER III

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM

THERE was no need or possibility of subterfuge between these two. Only once had they played at the game of cross purposes, and ever since they had carefully avoided the occasion that had set them on to it. As they faced each other now in the neat, narrow room each saw a new look in the other's face but no lack of affection or frankness.

"Who is she, son?" was the father's greeting.

In the boy's mind there was no room for wonder at the swiftness with which the news had traveled.

"The best girl in the world, dad."

"Of course, but can't you be just a bit more specific, Chris? The world is full of 'best girls.' She is good, too, as well as 'best'?"

The boy's face flamed at the implied criticism, and he answered briefly, "Good, too."

"But who is she? Remember I've heard nothing but the barest fact. I've not come here to judge or to argue, but don't you think I have a right to know?"

The color had faded from the boy's face and his voice was steadier. "I would have told you

as soon as there was anything to tell. But there's nothing, really, dad,— yet." The father smiled a little at the boy's simple-minded honesty.

"Nothing — yet," he mimicked. "But there will be as soon as you can have your way, eh, Chris? Is that it, my boy?"

"Yes, father, I think so."

"And her name?"

"Marie Lenholme."

"She is an actress?"

"Yes."

"Chris, Chris. What are you doing? You who are to be —" the father stopped the rush of his words with a gasp. Then he finished lamely, "You're only a boy — a college boy — with his own way to make. What do you propose to do?"

"Marry her if she'll have me."

"Do you doubt that part of it? Pardon me, Chris, I don't mean just that. Any woman should be proud to marry you — sometime, but why this haste? You are neither of you decrepit yet. Can't you wait a little while? Marriage is for life, my boy, or it ought to be if it's the right sort. Any other kind is only a shadow — only an echo of the real music of life. Why can't you wait?"

Chris drew his breath hard. "I could wait forever. I'm thinking of her. If you could hear her talk of the life she's had — dragged about the country with cheap companies where

the only things worse than the men are the women and the only things worse than either are the men who try to speak to her at the stage-door or in the hotels; living in cheap hotels and cheaper boarding houses and traveling any way except decently. I want to take her out of it, to save her from all she has to suffer now."

"Isn't that a little like giving her poison to keep her from being killed in a railroad wreck? I'm not laughing at you, Chris," to the boy's movement of impatience; "God knows, I never felt less like laughing in my life. I know you'll marry sometime, and I hope you will, but not now, my boy, not now. Help me to keep my trust!"

It was a cry from the man's soul and the boy felt his eyes grow moist. "You mean," he groped for the words, "do you mean you promised my — my — mother — something?"

The father stared at him, awe in his face. "Why, how — what — has someone —" Then self-possession came to him again. "Yes, Chris, yes, that's it. I promised your mother — everything, boy, everything. I must keep faith with her. It's almost time to tell you of the promise, Chris, and I want you for myself till that time."

It was eight years since they had faced each other on the narrow porch of the farmhouse and fought their battle over the strange woman by the roadside, but Chris felt again the thrill of mystery and wonder that had stiffened his small

spine then. Again, the plain, hard-handed scholar-farmer was the man of mystery with a buried past and strange hints of the future.

"Father, I'll do anything I can to help you, but don't ask me to give her up. Could you have given my mother up?"

The sadness of a life of renunciation was in the man's face as he answered slowly:

"I did give her up, son, and I gave her up forever. That's a long word, forever, and you can't find its definition in the dictionaries. You have to live it to define it. But that doesn't matter now. I've pretty nearly lived my life and it's you we're talking about. You've got to chart your own course, son, and all I can do is to teach you the few things I know about steering. Only be sure — mighty sure, Chris — that you take the right kind of passengers with you."

"She's the right kind, there's no mistake about that."

"Will you make a bargain with me, Chris? Take me to see her. Let me talk with her alone. I'll do or say nothing unfair, tell her nothing but the truth, use no threats or bribes. Then if she tells you of her own free will not to come and see her any more, to forget her as soon and as completely as you can, promise me you'll take your medicine like a man. Will you do it, Chris?"

Would he do it? His face cleared at the thought. What a bully old father it was! And what an easy way to the goal! For she would

never tell him to forget her, of that he was *sure*. The sun might forget to rise to-morrow, the world might spin backward on its axis, and the Milky Way dissolve into nothingness, but of one thing he was sure.

A little opposition is a great clarifier of the mental vision. Half an hour before Chris had been anything but sure of his lady love. In fact at times she had seemed decidedly weary of him and perhaps in time his disease would have run its course and disappeared, after the usual manner of youthful ailments, even without his father's interference, but just now he was as sure of her as he was of Heaven.

"Come along, dad." His voice was abnormally gay from the reaction. "It's as good as settled. When you see her, you won't say anything more about my giving her up. Grab your hat, quick! I was going to see her anyway, and she won't mind talking to you, too."

He could afford to be even a little patronizing, so sure was he of victory. Dear old dad was a brick, but he didn't know much about women after all. The older man was a long time finding his hat. Perhaps the room was dark with the shades drawn so low, and perhaps it was the sudden rush of light when the shades were shot up to the very top of the window by an impetuous young hand that drew the elder man's brows together and half closed his eyes in that queer frown.

Neither spoke of the girl on the walk down-

town. Chris prattled gayly of college and waved his hand easily to the groups of slouch-hatted, carelessly dressed young fellows they passed. The father nodded gravely now and then at the boy's sallies. A young professor, newly come from a great university in the East, looked after them with a smile. A country-bred student showing his farmer father about the college was his thought, and then in half apology to his own unspoken conceit, he assured himself of the great mission of the fresh-water college in such instances. And the country-bred student and the farmer father went on their way, never guessing that they had furnished material for a whole paragraph in a certain semi-weekly letter to a certain senior at Vassar.

They came to the hotel and the clerk forbore this time to refer to gay college boys and contented himself with remarking to a convenient bell-boy as he watched the pair march steadily up the stairs: "He's brought the old man along to look her over. This is a good imitation of the real thing. Bless you, my children."

The bell-boy dodged around the corner of the desk and stuck out his tongue at the witty clerk. Christopher was not the only one to fall a victim to Marie. The bell-boy had little patience with such shilly-shallying. When a man was ready to be married the thing to do was to tuck the object of his desire under one arm and beat it for the preacher's. Then when he had the wed-

ding certificate safe in his inside pocket the old folks might howl. Bring his old man to "look her over"? Not if he knew himself.

But smug young professor's unspoken patronage, clerk's amused comment, and bell-boy's silent contempt failed to touch the two who now stood outside Room 101. Christopher's knock was that of one who is sure of his welcome. He was almost as good as on his own hearthstone and dear old father was the stranger guest, but none the less dear.

"Come in. Ah, it's my little —"

The light welcome was cut short as the tall figure of an older man, and a stranger, loomed in the doorway behind the little soldier. The little soldier stammered an introduction. "It's my father — he wanted to — I've brought him to see you. He wants to talk to you."

The girl eyed the man with cold, bright, curious eyes. The soiled pink dressing sacque was not in commission to-day, the chairs were bare of their former burden of women's clothes, and the door to the next room was closed. The dimple too was out of use, and it was a hard-faced, potentially hostile woman with keen wits and a keener tongue, if need be, who bounced suddenly to her feet, and nodded stiffly in response to the father's bow. Chris was silent in astonishment. This was more like the Marie he had seen in the wings, minus the makeup and the weariness. Only the crown of red hair remained unchanged.

"I trust you will pardon the intrusion, Miss Lenholme." The girl stared at the cultivated accent and easy manner. What sort of farmer was this? "John Drew couldn't touch him with a step ladder," was her unspoken thought.

"My coming must seem strange to you, but my boy thought you would be so kind as to give me a few minutes of your time. I shall try to be brief."

Her nod was curt and cold. "You might as well sit down, anyway," grudgingly.

His father turned to Chris. "Will you wait outside, son? I shan't be long."

The boy's look at his face met only quiet kindness. Then the door closed behind him and the man and girl were alone. Up and down the dark, dingy hall the boy paced, his hands in his coat pockets, his lips pursed in a silent whistle. There could be but one outcome to the conference from which he was excluded, that he knew. To be sure, he had said nothing serious to Marie, but in five, ten, fifteen minutes at the most he would say it, and his whistle became audible at the thought. Then his spirits sank at the suspicion that perhaps they had been premature. What would she think of him, a grown man, bringing his father to ask her intentions before he had declared his own? What would any girl of spirit think under such circumstances? Wouldn't she show them both the door?

But dad was sensible and he had a way of put-

ting the most difficult questions so delicately that no one could possibly be offended. And she was sensible, too, if she was a little offish and suspicious at times. It would be all right. It would have to be. He would make it all right. How they would laugh over their suspicions of each other when it was all settled! And so he paced back and forth, juggling with his fears and hopes, counting the seconds till the door should open, fearing it would prove the door of disaster and knowing it must be the entrance to happiness.

And then after an unending succession of hopes and fears, after an eternity of pacing up and down and an endless number of false alarms, the door opened and his father came slowly out. His face was expressionless, save that his eyes held the old look of love and confidence as he laid his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"You can go in now, Chris. Thank you for bringing me. Good-by, Miss Lenholme."

That did not sound much like a death sentence, but Chris' step was slow as he crossed the threshold and faced the girl. Her face too was blank of expression.

"Marie," the boy stretched out his hands as though to take hers.

"Now stop right there. Don't say anything you'll be sorry for." Her back was to the window and he could not see her face clearly, but her voice was hard.

"Why — what do you mean? Has father —"

"Your father's all right, my boy, and so are you, but it's all off."

The hard tone and the flippant phrase chilled Christopher.

"I don't understand."

"Don't you? Neither do I — quite. But I know one thing. You've got to quit coming to see me. Cut it right out. I guess we can both understand that."

"Why, I thought — don't you care for me?" The boy's tone was growing hard too. He was recovering his breath after the first shock of the cold dash over his hopes.

"Care for you? I don't know whether I do or not. Not so much as you thought I did, I guess. Anyway, it's all off. It was good fun while it lasted, but, Lord, I never could care for one man more than a week. You've pretty near played the limit, son."

That was the last straw,— his father's term of affection on the lips of this hard-faced adventuress. "Don't call me 'son'! You've been playing with me, have you?"

Anger and wounded pride were battling fiercely over the ruins of his palace of love. He would be as brazen as she.

"Yes, it *has* been good fun. I've fooled both of you. Dad thought I was in love with you, and you did too. Love you? I hate you. I hope I'll never see you or hear of you again."

The foolish tears of youth were in his eyes, but

he dashed them away and steadied himself by the chairback to which he held. "It's a game two can play at, this being in love, and I've beat you at your own game." He bowed low in mockery while the girl watched him with wondering eyes, not cold now.

"I'm sorry," she began lamely.

"Sorry? For what? Because I fooled you? Don't do it. There are lots of other men in the world, and perhaps the next one you catch won't be such a good actor. The best actors are not on the stage, are they, Miss Lenholme? I can't say as much for the actresses."

It was his last bitter, boyish fling as he slammed the door shut behind him.

After he had gone the girl violated all dramatic precedent. She did not bury her face in her hands or throw herself down amid the soft pillows of a dainty couch and sob out tearful appeals for him to come back to her. There was no dainty couch among the properties of Room 101. Instead, she sat by the window for a long time and stared at a boy washing empty beer bottles in the courtyard of the hotel, and through her mind ran over and over again the question, "What did the old man mean? What's the answer anyway?" Then she roused herself and went down to supper.

And Christopher? He, too, violated dramatic precedent. He did not tickle his vanity with thoughts of suicide or seek out his father and

assure him that his heart was irreparably broken. Instead he walked out of the hotel burning with rage and humiliation, and without thought of his father's whereabouts tramped down Main Street and out into the country a full three miles before his anger cooled. Then he began to feel very sorry for himself and tramped back to town with a hearty appetite for supper. The next morning he went soberly to his eight o'clock recitation, and within a week he had progressed much farther in the direction of forgetting Marie than he would have thought possible in a decade a week before.

And when he thought of her at all it was not so much the feeling of blighted love that possessed him as wonder at what his father had told her. The man of mystery had appeared again.

CHAPTER IV

JUST A GAME

IT must be confessed to Christopher's shame that the Lenholme incident was far from being the tragic page in his memory that he had assured himself it would be — with no small satisfaction at the thought of bearing a secret wound through life. He pictured himself as a modern edition of the Spartan boy, clasping closer the fox of unrequited love as it tore at his vitals — for at least two weeks. Then the baseball season opened and he forgot to sigh. By the end of the spring term he could grin sheepishly at sly allusions to the inconstant stage moon, and when he came back to college at the beginning of his Junior year he could patronizingly advise lower classmen to stay away from the theater and spend their spare change on the football team.

By way of justifying such advice Christopher decided to devote not only his spare change but his spare time also to the football gods of Schuyler. For two years he had rendered humble service on the scrub and now, barring accidents, a place on the varsity was a strong possibility. To be sure it was not much of a team as football teams go, but it was the best the college could put out

and it was at least the product of their own brains and muscle.

Christopher's muscles were well seasoned by the active outdoor life and work of the farm and he had at least the courage of buoyant, unbroken youth. Such skill in the game as was his was purely the product of such intermittent, sometimes inefficient coaching as the college could afford, for football at Schuyler was not the tremendous, all-absorbing machine that it has become in some other places.

To Christopher the charm of the game lay in the shock of physical conflict, exciting but not unduly dangerous; in the swift rush of his team-mates behind and around him through and over their opponents; in the thrilling sense of conflict, the suspense that might end in the wonderful elation of victory or the dull depression of defeat — temporary, to be sure, but none the less unpleasant. Above all, there was the indescribable elation of body and mind that goes with complete physical fitness.

All these Christopher and his team-mates found on the campus in the golden October afternoons when the sun flung long shadows of elm and maple across the field and the red brick towers of Old Main looked down on the youth and life that had been its portion for more than half a century. Schuyler's athletes knew little of formal organization. Training table or field club house, there was none and each man provided the clothes

in which he played. More than once Christopher had seen men on the practice field in nothing more elaborate than a pair of outworn trousers, a tattered jersey, and old shoes rudely cleated by the town shoemaker.

Along the sidelines stood half the population of the college and more than a few town boys, commenting, advising, applauding, censuring, as occasion seemed to offer. It was thus a small football democracy in which the captain was liable at any time to find himself without power or players if he was thought to exercise that power too arbitrarily. Anyone was welcome on the field in the earlier days of the season to kick or catch the balls that were thrown around. If he chanced to show more than ordinary aptitude he was probably singled out for more particular attention that might end with a place in the lineup before the season was over.

Through that unorganized but surprisingly effective selective process had Christopher passed. Two years had he served on the scrub, giving himself to be battered and bruised for the greater glory of the varsity, hoping against his own judgment that before the season was over a miracle might be wrought and his great chance given him. Twice he had been on the substitute list and each time he had lain on the sidelines through the game, alternating between hope that the other man would be carried off the field and fear that he might be.

When he came back to the beginning of his Junior year, bronzed as an Indian, broader and taller, with his mind stored with the football knowledge gained by two years' hard experience on the scrub, there was little doubt now in his own mind that he would find his name on the coveted list. It was very pleasant, that half-busy, half-lazy life in the quiet little town where the affairs of every day moved on so steadily, sleepily almost, that strain of any sort was unfelt and practically unknown. Something of this spirit flowed over into the college and leisure rather than dissipation was the bane of more than one promising boy's career. In Christopher, however, an active, inquiring mind had sufficed so far to keep him alert, "on his toes," in the language of the athletic world in which he now moved.

Only one man did he fear as a rival to the place he coveted on the team. This was George Peyton, a sturdy, quiet-voiced lad of his own class, of whom little was known save that he was working his way through college. Quite by chance Christopher came to know him well that Junior fall, and with acquaintance came a new problem.

Unconsciously Peyton presented the problem himself one evening as they walked away from the gymnasium in the fast-falling twilight that came close on the heels of afternoon practice.

"Well, you're sure of it," said Peyton in good-natured envy. "You're a better tackle than I am and Henry's sure to play you."

"Nothing's sure till it's over," was Christopher's sage opinion. "You're just as close to it as anyone so far."

"Nothing doing—" this from Peyton. "My only chance is for you to break a leg or two. Lord knows I'd be pretty near willing to break one of my own for a chance to play through just one game."

Christopher glanced at him curiously. "As bad as all that?" he said lightly. "What'll you give me if I sprain an ankle? Or a broken finger might be cheaper."

But Peyton was all seriousness. "It'd mean a heap to my old man if I could show him my name in the paper. He's a coal miner, you know, and all he can give me to help me through is my time. I'm not much in my classes and I can't win any great bunches of prizes in debates or essay-writing or anything else that takes brains. So I thought maybe I could climb into fame on a football. Besides, I like the game," he added ingenuously.

Christopher had little in the way of consolation or advice to offer on the spur of the moment. "Stick to it," was the best he could say. "It's anybody's place yet and you've got as much right to put your initials on it as the next man."

But in his heart he was sure that the only initials destined to be carved at left tackle were not G. P. but C. D.

The next afternoon at practice it was Christopher who was beckoned into line by the coach

when it was time to run through the signals. It was Christopher, too, who held the same place when the daily scrimmage with the scrubs began. This time, though, George Peyton faced him on the scrub. Evidently the coach was not without discernment of a sort. He would try the two candidates out against each other face to face. The two boys faced each other, friendly but determined, Peyton short, stocky, good-natured, determination written large on his freckled face; Christopher taller, more rangy, the natural athlete in build and bearing, showing less of his feeling in his face, but none the less ready to fight for what he wanted.

That first day, what advantage there was lay with Christopher. To be sure, he had behind him all the power of the stronger, better trained team and the uplift of spirit that goes with the growing consciousness of success. Furthermore, when the two clashed now and again, man to man, Christopher's mind seemed a shade the quicker to anticipate, his body a fraction the earlier to respond. Once or twice, though, in the course of the long, grueling practice game, he caught himself looking at Peyton half-pityingly and visioning in a formless way the other's background of hope and ambition. Each time that he did this his next charge or block was a little slower, lacked something of the vigor and decisiveness that were needed. And each time Peyton was through him in that second of delay.

A sharp word from the coach, a slap on the back from the big guard at his right hand and on the next play he opened the line or blocked the way of the other man in workmanlike fashion. After the game the coach walked with him across the field to the gymnasium.

"You're all right when you're awake, Dunham," he remarked casually. "Keep your eye on the ball and get the jump on the other fellow. It's the man that hits first who counts in this game, and you haven't got so much on Peyton that you can afford to take any chances. You've got to keep on fighting."

Christopher nodded his understanding, but his eyes were troubled. It was a pity, he thought, that Martin had such a grip on the other tackle position. Both he and Peyton could have been sure of their places, but Martin was captain and this was his fourth year. The man who could dislodge him hadn't appeared yet.

The next day's practice was a repetition of the first and the day after that, except that there were fewer moments of pity for Peyton, fewer periods of slacking in his play.

The coach remarked to the captain that Dunham seemed to have bought an alarm clock at last, and the captain nodded with a shrewd glance at the opponents walking in friendly fashion from the field. Martin was older than most men of his class and had won to his college course by years of hard work and grinding self-denial. His sym-

pathy leaned a little to Peyton, but his clear head recognized the superior power of Christopher.

"Dunham can outplay the other fellow — when he wants to," he admitted half-regretfully. "I wonder if he can keep on wanting to?"

"What do you mean?" the coach asked quickly. The two stood together now just outside the gymnasium door.

"Nothing much, I guess. Only I've always had a sneaking sympathy for the under dog. It's such darned hard work for him."

"But you said something about Dunham's not keeping on wanting to beat Peyton. What did you mean by that?" the coach persisted.

"Well, it's like this." Martin's speech was slow and thoughtful. "A thoroughbred can beat a cart horse every crack out of the box if running's the thing you need. But the cart horse has been trained for generations of cart horses to get down and pull and keep on pulling. That's his business. He doesn't know anything else. Set a thoroughbred to a steady pull and he gets tired of it mighty quick. It isn't in his blood. In a way Dunham and Peyton are thoroughbred and cart horse."

"They say blood will tell," interjected the coach whimsically.

"It does," was Martin's slow, serious reply. "But it's the blood of the cart horse that tells most of the time. He does the work of the world and sets the thoroughbred free to do his running.

Dunham may be a stayer, but I'd feel more like putting my money on him after he's been kicked around a little. Peyton's the kind that's been taught to hang on since he was a kid. It's the only chance that sort of a boy has."

Meanwhile thoroughbred and cart horse alike were capering gayly under the cold shower, with no conscious thought for the time of the friendly warfare between them. Martin greeted them with gruff good nature as he entered the dressing room and dropped a word of friendly warning to all and sundry. "No late hours and no pie or cake from this time on. And no smoking," and he shot a quick glance at a fresh-faced lad in the corner, who colored and glanced quickly down at his hands to see if the telltale yellow stain that had discolored his fingers at the beginning had disappeared.

The warning as to hours and smoking was not needed for either Christopher or Peyton. Healthy fatigue drove them both to bed even before their next day's lessons had had their full share of attention and neither would have risked his chance at the team for much more than an occasional surreptitious cigarette.

That evening, however, Christopher, strolling idly along on his way back to his room after supper, was stopped by Peyton, who hailed him from the second-story window of a faded, battered house that had wedged itself between a blacksmith shop and a livery stable. It was not the

part of town that students were wont to select for their living quarters, but Peyton had followed the lure of cheap rent.

"Come on up, if you've got a minute," he called to Christopher.

"Thought you might like to look at my diggings," he added after Christopher had pushed open the half-closed street door and groped his way up the narrow stairs with faded, threadbare carpet and peeling wallpaper.

"Take the chair or sit on the bed, whichever you like," Peyton threw over his shoulder as he struggled to replace the smoky chimney of his kerosene lamp.

Christopher threw himself on the bed as evidence of his intention to treat this as no more than an ordinary dropping in for a few minutes of gossip before making his way back to his own room. As he could, he glanced about the room, taking in the evidence of poverty — in the house itself and in Peyton. The furniture was meager — a chair that quite obviously belonged in the kitchen, a cheap pine table that bore a few text-books and a notebook or two, a battered bureau with all three drawers hanging half open and on the top a pitifully cheap brush and comb. In the darkest corner was a washstand with chipped bowl and pitcher. Christopher was accustomed to severe plainness in house furnishing — in fact, he had no memory of anything else — but this was dif-

ferent from anything he had seen in other fellows' rooms that he had known. They were plain, but with the plainness of simple-minded frugality that saw in chairs and tables only the necessary instruments for the accomplishment of definite purposes. Here was the plainness of use outworn. Poverty, slack, unstriving poverty, hung over the whole house, pervaded it like an atmosphere. Christopher felt the pressure of it on his spirit and his usually ready tongue found little to say.

Peyton caught his furtive glance around the room and grinned in good humor. "Not much of a place, is it?" he said. "But it's the best I can do. I can tell you I have to count the pennies — count 'em twice over to make sure none of 'em get away from me. Last year I had a room without any fire in it and cold days I did most of my studying at the library. Three minutes was my regular time for undressing after I hit the room and sometimes I didn't even wait to undress — just shucked off my shoes and crawled in as I stood. The bed covers weren't all they should have been."

Christopher whistled in surprise. Peyton had kept his health and his nerve and his thirst for an education through all that! He said as much and Peyton grinned again. "'Tain't as though I'd never been up against that sort of thing before," he said. "We always had plenty to eat at home, but no frills and one fire was often the best we could do — in the cook-stove at that, and you know

a cook-stove ain't the best thing in the world for heating a house. So I'm used to sleeping cold sometimes and breaking the ice when I want to wash. Last summer, though, I made a strike selling 'The Way to Wealth,' half morocco, four dollars and a half and worth at least fifty cents. So I can blow myself to a room with a stove in it now. There's the stovepipe hole and I can show you the stove down in the cellar."

It was a new phase of life to Christopher and he pondered it in silence. All his life he had known hard work and self-denial but nothing like this. Compared with Peyton's struggles his own upbringing had evidently been in the lap of luxury.

Meanwhile Peyton rattled on: "This is my old man," he said, dragging a badly damaged tintype out of the top bureau drawer. Christopher took it in his hand and saw a prototype of George, a square block of a man with wide-open eyes, cap on the back of his head, a wide, humorous mouth with more than a touch of firmness in it, broad, sturdy shoulders built for the hewing of wood and the drawing of water. Christopher glanced from the picture to Peyton and back to the picture.

"Isn't he the husky little miner, though," prattled the other. "I guess if he had to, dad could just about carry his weight all day long and come up smiling at the end of it. Been a miner all his life. Pitboy in Cornwall when he was ten. Landed at Castle Garden when he was twenty and hit for the mines of Pennsylvania. I was born

at Scranton. When I was ten years old an anthracite strike drove us out of the Keystone State and we landed at Spring Valley."

Christopher, listening with all his ears, broke in with a swift question. "How did you happen to come to college? How could your father afford it?"

"He can't. He don't. I've paid my own way from the first day. Dad let me go to High School at Spring Valley. You see, if we'd stayed in England I'd have had to turn in as soon as I was big enough and help support the family. But here dad can make enough to buy food and a few clothes and the town gave me my preparation for college. When I once got in it was easy enough. I can do it on a hundred and fifty a year, including tuition, and a grown man that can't make that much money in a year and go to school at the same time isn't much good. I do chores for my board over at Stanford's and Saturdays and holidays I can pick up enough odd jobs to help out. Besides I work every summer and there you are."

It was later than it should have been when Christopher left Peyton's room and he lay awake for a long time thinking of the stocky Cornish miner and his stocky son who was working so manfully and uncomplainingly to make his dreams come true. The next day Christopher's thoughts went with him to the football field and on the first lineup Peyton jumped through and nailed the man with the ball before he had time fairly to start.

"Wake up there, Dunham!" the coach fairly bellowed. "Think this is morning prayers?"

Martin shot a glance at the boy and smiled grimly. Score one for the cart horse. As for Christopher, it was hard for him to get back his accustomed keenness. Try as he would, he saw in Peyton not the opponent who must be beaten, but the son of a Cornish miner who was fighting his way up from the lower levels to a place in the day-long sunshine. The game went poorly on the left side of the line in consequence and Christopher came in for more than one sharp word from coach and captain. At the end of practice Martin threw an arm across the boy's shoulder as they entered the gymnasium. "What's the matter, kid?" he asked. "Getting tired? This is no time to slow up, you know."

Christopher read the warning in the friendly words and shook his head. "Don't know," he said. "Just felt a little off to-day, I guess. I'll be all right to-morrow."

The next day Peyton failed to report for practice and Christopher went at the utterly unimportant scrub who had been pushed in to face him and nearly tore the badly frightened boy in pieces. Then came Saturday and the first game of the season. Christopher went through it like a veteran, scoring a touchdown and holding his end of the line like a very lively pillar of stone.

The next week Peyton came back to his place on the scrub and Christopher's work grew ragged

again. Coach and captain were in despair. On Wednesday Peyton was away again and Christopher's work was flawless. The coach was cheered but puzzled. "He's got me guessing," he said to the captain that night as they sat in conference in the coach's room. "Some days he plays like a fiend and then he plays as though he'd grown fast to the ground. What's the matter with him? Is the kid in love?"

Martin remembered the Lenholme affair, now nearly a year old, and shook his head with a smile. "Not now," he said. Then his face sobered. "Have you noticed that it's only when Peyton plays against him that he falls down? Other times he's keen as a pup."

"Think he's afraid of Peyton?" the coach shot out.

Martin shook his head. "He wasn't afraid of that big bruiser from Clinton that he went up against last Saturday," he said, "and that chap was twice as much of a scrapper as Peyton. Peyton plays hard, but that's nothing to make Dunham afraid of him." He brooded a moment in silence. Then his face lighted on the instant and he looked up. "Maybe a little talk will clear things up," he said.

"With Dunham?" the coach queried.

"No, with Peyton. Unless I miss my guess there's the key to the situation."

A few days longer Martin waited and watched. Another game was played on Saturday and Chris-

topher went through it in dashing fashion. But the end of the next week was to bring a game harder than any that had been played so far and the coach was ready to fume and rage at any slip or slackness. Even Martin came in for a share of the ragging. Wednesday the captain decided that the time had come to put his theory to the test and Peyton was honored by a visit from the captain of the team. "Don't say anything yet," were his parting words. "Wait and see. We'll put someone else against him for a while to-morrow and you can watch from the sidelines."

Despite the coach's raging and the captain's watchful glances Christopher held his place on the team through the week — by how narrow a margin he never knew — and on Saturday brought the bleachers to their feet more than once by smashing tackles or irresistible charges through the line that broke the interference into bits before it could get under way.

But the coach, crouching on the sidelines, was tormented with the fear that each play would find the boy in the grasp of one of those moments of slackness that caught him in practice.

"He's the best on the team except yourself, when he's right," he admitted to Martin after the game. "But when he's bad, he's the limit. I'm scared to death all the time for fear he'll go to sleep some time when it's vital."

Martin smiled. "Wait," was his only word. Sunday he halted Peyton in the street. "Any

time you like now," he said and went on. That afternoon Peyton dropped in on Christopher. "Just to return your call," he explained with a grin and started the conversational ball rolling in a wide arc that brought it around soon to the all-absorbing game.

"Why don't you like to play against me?" Peyton asked suddenly.

Christopher gasped a little at the abrupt question. "Why, I do," he said. "What made you think I didn't?"

"You don't play like it. I watched you yesterday and I watched you at practice last week when Skeets Baker was in my place. You didn't play like the same man. When I'm up against you you act half the time as though you were afraid of hurting me. Trying to throw the place to me?"

A quick retort was on Christopher's lips, but a flash of self-revelation stopped it. Wasn't that what he had been doing, after all? Unconsciously and without intention, had he not been holding back time and again when those flashes had come to him of a stocky Cornish miner and his pride in his stocky son?

He answered slowly, "I wonder if I have?"

Peyton's eyes were on him closely, as he went on to give words to a feeling that was hardly capable of definite form. Peyton broke in on his stumbling explanation.

"I thought so. That's what M—— what I

thought." He must not reveal Martin's share in it. "Now, look here," he went on, "I want that place but I don't want anyone to hand it to me on a platter. Either I'm better than you are or I ain't. If I ain't, then play up and keep me out. The next time I catch you slacking off I quit the game for keeps. Now you know where I stand. Football's like a lot of other things. Either you do it for all you're worth or you don't do it at all. There's no halfway ground. When we're on the field what I am and what I want don't count. It's your business to play all you know to keep me from getting your place away from you."

Few words, but added to Christopher's suddenly acquired self-comprehension, they were enough. The next afternoon, to be sure, there were one or two occasions when Christopher slowed a little and let Peyton by an instant too soon, but the next lineup a warning grin and a muttered "I'm goin' to quit the game, you know," keyed him up to his work and the disturbing thoughts disappeared. When practice was over the coach grunted his satisfaction and Martin nodded at Peyton.

It is no part of this chronicle to follow Peyton and Christopher through the rest of the football season; to tell how Christopher scored the winning touchdown from a blocked kick in the last great game; to picture the bleachers rocking with rapture as he staggered across the line; to narrate how Captain Martin with the game won and only three

minutes to play wrenched his ankle and yielded his place to Peyton, thereby assuring that sturdy lad of the coveted S on his sweater. All those things happened, but they are unimportant here. What is important is that Christopher had learned from a stocky Cornish lad one useful lesson in life — Play all you know whatever the game. It doesn't seem much, but before many years he had occasion to remember it.

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CHAPTER V

THE CHANCE OF HIS LIFE

FOOTBALL and the lighter pursuits of odd moments made up by no means the sum total of Christopher's life at Schuyler. There were, for example, the intercollegiate debates in which he won a place on the Schuyler team and was soundly beaten, thereby learning the useful lesson that goes with a good round thrashing. He tried for the college paper and won a lowly place, consoling himself for the loss of a higher by the thought that brilliancy and journalistic success are not necessary synonyms. He had been elected to a fraternity and had learned to dance, to bow, and to talk without serious effort or thought. He had made a few friends among the people of the town and was occasionally asked out to dinner, tremendous occasions at first which gradually lost their fear-compelling aspects.

And with it all he found time to study enough, to think a great deal and to foregather perhaps oftener than he should with congenial spirits of his own age and class. He stood among the first five of his class and might have stood higher, but the places above him were held by men to whom a college education meant four years of acquisition,

four years of cramming as they cram the helpless geese at Strasburg. Christopher found so many things worth doing — so many pleasant paths to follow that he was more than once at a loss which promised most. So, all in all, it was much to his credit that he was able to stand as high as fifth.

It was in the winter of his Senior year that the great Personage came to Schuyler, no less a being than H. Anisty Norton, the rising sun of national finance, the central body around which revolved scores of lesser luminaries, some of them centers of smaller systems of their own. H. Anisty had first risen to power as the American representative of a great European house which made and unmade the fortunes of the world over-night, at whose nod kings trembled — or paid their debts if the nod was favorable — at whose smile the nations of the earth burst into a loud guffaw of merriment.

Such is a brief paraphrase of the current journalistic characterization of the house of Frankmeyer which H. Anisty represented in the New World. He had begun with a million-dollar nest egg which a prudent Yankee father had brooded with jealous care but with slow increase. Time had been when Europe poured her millions into American industries with a lavish hand, sending out her argosies on the gambling chance of a safe port across the water and a speedy and profitable return. But the seas were badly charted and

storms were many and violent, so that scores of rich treasure craft foundered or fell victims to the wreckers who waited on the rocky shores.

Europe lost much money, which means that she gained much wisdom. *Caveat emptor,* and the *emptor* who has seen his millions melt away soon learns to *caveat* to some purpose. So the great house of Frankmeyer, and after them scores of smaller offshoots of the alien rulers of the Gentile world, stationed outposts in the Western Hemisphere — keen-witted bankers who should answer with their bank accounts for the millions entrusted to their care, which is much more to the point than to require a man to answer with such an unconsidered trifle as his life. For while a certain Good Book declares with an air of finality that all a man has will he give for his life, the Book neglects to state that while lives are often given for nothing, for a breath of wind, for a silk rag, for the wounded feelings of a king's favorite, for another man's ambition, for thirteen dollars a month and found, for an idea that few can explain, no man cheerfully gives money without what he considers a fair equivalent.

All this talk is merely to explain the presence of the great house of Frankmeyer in America, which explained the power of H. Anisty Norton, who utterly failed to explain Christopher or to understand him. For, as has been said, H. Anisty came to Schuyler, and college and town turned out to do him honor. The simple life was indigenous

at Schuyler, but there was no deep-rooted prejudice against money as such. So simple-minded were they there that they actually believed that a name could be worthy and wealthy in the same generation. Perhaps it could then. Times change greatly when the printing presses are working overtime.

For the third time and finally H. Anisty Norton came to Schuyler — though he really came but once. He had been asked to speak at the exercises which annually commemorated the self-sacrifice of the pious land speculators who had founded the college. He would not — decidedly not — be asked to contribute to the endowment fund, but if he saw the needs of the institution, and the good president rubbed his hands and smiled inwardly at the thought, his generosity would not be quenched and he might even be asked to sit on the Board of Trustees. Such a busy man would probably refuse even that tempting honor, but a No from H. Anisty was an honor in itself — like being sworn at from the throne.

The grayhaired old president spoke first at the "Founders' Day Exercises" and was applauded loudly. Then other men spoke — some of the glories of the past, others of the burdens of the present, and one or two of the problems of the future. These few, however, stuck closely to the belief that the old pioneer virtues of thrift, honesty, and industry were as all-sufficient an equipment for the future as they had been sixty years

before. The glory of the past was the favorite theme, however, as being eminently safe and beyond contradiction or argument. Between speeches the college band played and the glee club sang and everybody applauded and looked pleased with themselves, and wondered if it wasn't time to go home to dinner.

Chris sat in the chapel gallery with his father at his side and listened and applauded with the rest — and probably understood it all a little more. The smug young professor on the platform who no longer wrote semi-weekly letters to a certain senior at Vassar — probably because he saw her across the coffee cups every morning — smiled more than once — inwardly, of course — at all this talk of a past sixty years long. His own alma mater had been born when the nation was but a narrow fringe of colonists along a rocky coast and the founders had kept a careful eye on their flintlocks as they prayed and planned for the salvation and education of the red-skinned brother. That was a past to think about — and many people spend much time thinking about it — but sixty years? a beggarly single lifetime!

But to Christopher it was much more than a mere matter of years. The history of the college was the history of the civilization in which he lived. When it was founded Black Hawk and his warriors had but lately turned their faces westward. News of the New World Thermopylæ at the Alamo was fresh along the upper waters

of the Mississippi and its branches, Texas was standing very shakily on the new-found legs of her independence, and Mexico held the Pacific coast north to the British line. A beggarly lifetime! But the dreaming boy in the gallery let himself slip back along the path hinted at rather than pointed to by the speakers, and saw the history of a great Commonwealth unrolled before his eyes. He saw the wagons of the pioneers crossing the flower-studded prairies, seeking the groves along the stream where they might find wood in abundance and water unpoisoned by the pernicious "fever-an'-ager." He saw the collection of log huts rise where the first settlers gathered to lay the foundation of town and college. He saw the political structure of the state grow under the shaping hands of Trumbull and Davis and Logan and Edwards and their like, great and small.

The picture grew and he saw two figures move forward out of the gathering crowd, one short and stocky, with a massive head and a wide, loose-lipped mouth like an actor's, the other tall, ungainly, uncouth in walk and gesture, with a sad, homely, humorous face and eyes that seemed to mirror all the accumulated sorrow of the world. He saw the regiments gathering to crush the Great Rebellion, and the maimed and shattered hosts come creeping home at the end of the four red years. He saw the state pulling itself together and girding its loins for the peaceful contest that

followed the delirium of war, saw the cornfields ripening in the sunshine, the smoke curling up from a thousand factories, heard the ring of forges and the roar of furnaces and the shriek of locomotives that foretold the freeing of the sluggish Mississippi from its burden of freight and humanity. All this he saw and heard much more than he saw and heard the small and large greatness that droned and shrieked and gesticulated on the platform.

And in the foreground of the picture was Schuyler — always Schuyler — at first the little candle of learning in the darkness of the unplowed wilderness, then the steady arc-light of education amid the din and smoke of workshops, the rush of hurrying trains, and the unvarying industry of farm and forest. All that was best and greatest in the state was concentrated in her. All that was mean and base found in her a rebuke and an example of righteousness.

H. Anisty's speech was brief and to the point. Time was money and he wasted neither. "This is the day of achievement," he said. "The dreamer has given place to the doer. These halls and libraries and laboratories," and he swept his arm brusquely as though in appraisal of the Schuyler plant, "are a monument to achievement — are achievements in themselves. The world wants men who can do things, and it is willing to pay. It owes no man a living, but it pays its just debts, cash on the nail."

Even the grayhaired triumvirate applauded, and the good old president, the friend of Lincoln, clapped his wrinkled hands.

"I have a proposition to make to you young men," H. Anisty went on. "I need young men in my business — need them all the time. I will take two from each graduating class on the recommendation of the president and I'll give them the chance of their lives. If they make good, I'll make *them*. If they don't make good, so much the worse for them."

Then he sat down, and the old president, in a quavering voice, thanked the great man, who had not known Lincoln, but who knew a good thing when he saw it, even in a fresh-water college, for his generous offer to old Schuyler and to her boys — his boys, for they were his, every one, good and bad.

The exercises were over and dinner waited. Christopher and his father dined at the hotel. The boy was filled with enthusiasm and fairly bubbling at thought of the future.

"What a chance, father! *What* a chance!" he said over and over. "I'd give my eye teeth for it."

The father eyed him gravely. "Would you, son? Yes, I suppose you would. Yet H. Anisty Norton isn't the only man in the world, you know. And all the roads to fame don't run through his office. Several men have risen to greatness without his help in the past and I reckon a few will

do it again. Would you go if you had the chance, son?"

"Would I go? Of course, I'd hate to be so far away from you, but think of the opportunity! Why, I might be a rich man in a few years, rich enough to stick libraries all over the campus and line the place with dormitories."

"And fill the libraries with wisdom and the dormitories with students, I suppose. Don't be in a hurry on Schuyler's account, Chris. She's been poor so long that wealth might turn her head. The right kind of poverty never yet hurt a man or a college. As for H. Anisty Norton, I wouldn't change places with him to-day for all his money. His only son died in a drunken brawl and his wife broke her heart over the dead boy. He hasn't got so much out of the game after all, son."

But the chance fell to Chris's lot, for all that. A message came to his room after dinner that the president wished to see him at once. His father frowned at the summons and turned to fling his arm across the boy's shoulder.

"Promise me one thing, son. Keep me in the background. H. Anisty Norton will not ask to see a plain old farmer like me, but if he does, tell him you can't find me. I'll keep out of your way safe enough."

The boy's face flamed crimson. "Father, if you think I'm —"

The man answered the unfinished declaration. "I know you're not ashamed, son. I just don't want to meet him, that's all. Call it foolish prejudice if you like. Call it part of the mystery of the lost years," and he glanced keenly at the boy, who flushed again and moved uneasily. "Call it anything you please, but leave me out of it. If you go at all, it will not be till after you graduate. I shall have a present for you then that may make you change your mind. Now go and meet your patron and I'll run and hide."

"Father, I'll chuck it up, if you want me to. If there's any reason why you think I ought not to see Mr. Norton, I'll refuse to go. I'll refuse whether you tell me the reason or not. Just say the word."

"No, no, son. Run along. Hear what the great man has to say. Somehow I think, Chris, — I think that no matter what you say to-day, when you go East it won't be to enter H. Anisty Norton's army."

"*When* I go East? What do you mean, dad? I won't go unless I accept this chance. If I've got to find my own hole, Illinois is good enough for me."

"Perhaps, son, perhaps. Mind, I only said 'I think.'"

More mystery! What did his father mean? Wasn't it enough for a fellow to have the chance of a lifetime flashed on him out of the dark like

this without having his mind distracted with mysterious hints at strange forces that lurked in the background to make him alter his decision?

H. Anisty Norton was in a very good humor with himself — and therefore with everyone else — as he sat in the good gray president's office and listened to his prattle about the college, its glories of the past, its needs in the present, and its hopes for the future. The great man heard him with half an ear. He had done a good thing in his large, brusque way and he had the satisfied feeling that comes only from a good dinner or a generous deed that one can easily afford. Some of the raw recruits from Schuyler might in time be shaped into serviceable veterans. To be sure, they knew nothing, but they would have nothing to unlearn. If they should not prove tractable, the doors of his office swung out as well as in, and the hinges were well oiled.

So he looked up with what would have been a smile on any other man's face at the two awe-stricken youngsters the president's secretary ushered in. Chris was in the rear and his classmate was named first. The great man nodded curtly and pushed back his chair so that Chris's name was lost in the grating of the chair legs on the bare floor.

Three swift questions and three slightly tremulous but fairly confident answers, a quick glance from head to foot, a wave of the hand and boy number one was mustered in. His name does

not matter. He is assistant manager of the bond department in the great firm of H. A. Norton & Co., to-day, and deeply grateful for the chance of a lifetime that was offered him in the good gray president's office that February afternoon.

Then the great man turned to Chris. "Your name?" Chris had felt very unsteady about the knees and very dry as to lips a moment before, but a miracle of self-confidence was vouchsafed him and his pulse dropped to normal and his eyes cleared on the instant. A passing feeling of familiarity touched him as he answered:

"Christopher Dunham."

"What? Say that again!" It was the tone and manner that his vassals — even his partners — knew and feared, but Chris's answer came without a quiver.

"Haven't I seen you before? Where do you live? What's your father's name?"

The volley surprised Chris, but he did not waver.

"My father is James Dunham and I live on a farm in the next county."

"Which way, east or west?"

Why not north or south? Chris wondered, but his answer was "West."

The great man stroked his cheek. "Strange, strange. I could swear I've seen you before, but I can't tell where."

Then, as Chris watched, wonder, incredulity, belief swept over the great man's face — the face

that had fronted disaster, the anger of maddened opponents, the frenzied despair of beaten men without a change in line or color.

"It can't be, but I believe she was right after all. Strange! Strange!" And he turned to the window and stared out into the thin wintry sunshine. The old president was puzzled and the other boy frankly wide-mouthed with astonishment. Chris alone stood fast and waited. Even in his surprised suspense he had a thrill of the secret pleasure that thought of his father's lost years and the possible mystery in his own life had always given him.

Minutes ticked away and still the great man stared through the window. When he turned, there was something that resembled a smile hovering about the corners of his mouth.

"And so you want to come into my office?" Was ever such a commonplace outcome to an affair that promised so much? Chris was distinctly disappointed. However, he had surprised the great man once, and if he could find the secret, he might do it again.

"Yes, sir, if you will have me."

"All right, that settles it. I'll look for you the first of July. I sail on the fifth and I shall expect to see you in the harness before I go. Good-by, Mr. President. My train leaves in fifteen minutes. No, don't thank me. I've enjoyed myself. You've a good little school here. You'll hear from me again."

That was all then. No explanations, no hint at the thought that had brought a human look to the face which his enemies swore had not changed once in twenty years, no attempt to part the veil of which Chris was always dimly conscious.

But that was *not* all. At the threshold he turned and swept the boys with a glance. His arm swung up and his imperious forefinger pointed to the predestined assistant manager of his bond department. "You'll come. You'll be a fool if you don't."

The finger swung across and leveled itself at Chris. "You won't. You'll be a fool if you do."

That was all. He was outside and hurrying down the walk to the depot hack that waited to take him to his car.

Five minutes later the two boys came slowly down the outer steps.

"What the dickens did he mean by saying you wouldn't come?" asked the embryo assistant manager.

"Search me. He didn't know himself. I'll be there, don't you worry."

But he wasn't.

CHAPTER VI

HIS FATHER'S STORY

IT was the day after Commencement and Chris and his father sat again on the front porch of the little farmhouse. Another Hilda poured forth the joy of her soul in sad, Swedish monotone as she rattled the supper dishes. There had been the usual festivities the day before, the usual words of loving pride in his boys by the good, gray president, the usual pointing of the way to success by the imported elderly dignitary, the usual partings with classmates, softened by mutual promises to write and to meet again in the old, accustomed places at the next Commencement and the next — the promises that everyone means and so few keep. It had been very fine and very inspiring, and very heartbreaking at the end.

And now he was home to catch his breath for the great plunge. There was something humorously suggestive of the small boy of years before in Chris's attitude as he sat on the top step of the porch with his back against the single pillar and his chin propped in his hands. The look of him sent his father's thoughts traveling back along the years and a dull pain pulled at his heart. He had known always it could not last. Every father

knows that his son must grow away from him and a very few of them admit it. The rest turn their backs on their knowledge or wage fierce warfare with it.

This one saw the fact and faced it with sad calmness.

"So you've finished and begun, son."

"Yes, I've finished and begun. I used to wonder why they called it Commencement. I know now. I wish I had it to do all over again."

"It's the way the world goes, Chris. Always the good old days. It's age that makes them good. But you're not afraid, are you, son?"

"Not afraid, just shaky. The way a fellow feels when he's getting ready to dive, you know."

"I know. I dived once myself. I couldn't swim very well, though, and I've been content to wade most of the time. I believe you're one of the swimmers."

"I hope so, but you must stand by to throw me a life-preserver if I go under, dad."

The man drew a long breath. Now was the time. He had kept faith with the past, he had finished the appointed course.

"Chris!" There was something serious, almost portentous in the man's tone.

The boy's chin lifted from his hands. "Yes, dad."

"What would you say if I told you that I had, not a life-preserver, but a boat of your own, an ocean-going steam yacht, say, for you?"

"Why — why, what do you mean, dad?" Wonder was in his face, perhaps a little amazed dread, and surely pleased expectation too.

"Listen, boy. You used to be a great hand for stories when you were a lad. Do you remember how you would tease me for them ages ago? I have one to tell you now that's waited nearly twenty years — waited for your ears to be ready to hear it. It's a story about two men — a — a woman and later about a small boy. There was a third man, but he doesn't count in the story.

"The two men loved the woman. One was a dreamer, a decent sort of fellow in his way, but a poor way. The other man was a tall, strapping fellow with thick, curly hair and eyes that always had a laugh in them somewhere — one of the kings of earth that women love and men follow. They were both older than the woman. She was a slender slip of a thing with crinkly hair that tumbled about her face and shone in the sun. She was the gayest thing that the good Lord ever blessed this earth with and every man who saw her fell in love with her straightway.

"Don't interrupt me, son," the voice lingered on the word. "You'll have plenty of time for questions when I'm through. These two men, the dreamer and the kingly chap, fell in love with her, of course, but they kept their friendship. That was the unusual part of it. I like to think sometimes that the dreamer was largely responsible for the fact that the tie between them remained

unbroken. Blind enough in most things, his eyes were keen to see the woman's goodness and beauty and his own unworthiness. The woman loved the other man, of course, the tall one, and when he asked her one day, she told him so frankly and simply, with tears in her eyes, for she liked the dreamer too, in a different way, and she could not bear to hurt even so much as a worm — or a dreamer.

"When the dreamer heard of it he hid his pain like a little man and hoped they would be very happy. And they were — for a little over a year. Then their boy was born — and the mother died. She wanted to live, Chris. God! how she wanted to live, but she could not, and when she died her last word was for her husband and her baby son whom she had never held in her arms. When she could not speak any more, she smiled at the man, the smile that won his love, that was like sunshine before, but I think was more like a lost moonbeam then. That smile was on her lips when she died."

The man's voice was even and monotonous, but more sad to the boy's sympathetic ears than wailing and lamentation. It went on, level and unvarying.

"The two men and the boy were left. All the love that had been lavished on the mother was now the boy's. He was the living embodiment of her, not only flesh of her flesh, but born of the unquenchable love and laughter of her spirit. He

was more fortunate than many boys, for two men loved him, the dreamer who had lost and the other who had won the girl — and a memory. The boy grew fast; sturdy he was and able soon to stand on his own feet and gurgle with delight at the good things that life gave him, not yet saddened by the knowledge that the best thing in the world had been taken away.

"The father loved him as few boys have been loved, but he bore the burden of his loss too, as a weight on his spirit that never lifted. He was young as the years go, but the memory of the night when he knelt by the bedside of his boy's mother and saw the light die out of her eyes rested upon him more heavily than many years. Perhaps what was coming would have come anyway, but I think the burden he bore hastened it.

"For weeks he had been conscious of a pain around his heart as from a slowly tightening band. He had never known what it was to be ill, even for a day, and the thought of physical weakness filled him with anger and disgust. At last he went to see a doctor, a great man, wise in his profession and learned beyond belief in the thousand and one varieties of pain that torture human flesh. From the first searching question the man read his doom in the doctor's eyes. He had a month at most to balance his books for this world and open his accounts for the next. His first thought was for his son, his last of the girl-wife he was following. We can never know the

last thought, Chris, but the first I have kept — for you. Do you want to read it now?"

"Then I was the boy?"

"Yes."

"And you, dad?" Even the old word came unconsciously.

"Your dad, but not your father. I was the dreamer, son. I lost your mother, but I've had you for nearly twenty years, and I think she has been content. She has had your father, lad, and she knew that I would keep my faith with you."

"And my — the message for me?" He could not bring himself to give the word father to that other misty being whom he could not remember. It was too cruelly unjust to the man who had been father and mother to him.

"I have it, sealed as it was given to me, a week before your father died. It was his story. I have no right to tell you what is in it. Will you read it now?"

The man had told his story, the mystery was stripped from the lost years, the sacrifice was almost accomplished. He was ready, anxious, to finish it to the uttermost.

"I think I'd like to read it now, by myself — if you don't mind." The boy's eyes searched the man's face lovingly, anxiously. The other nodded in comprehension.

"It is your right — and his."

They went into the house together, father and son no longer. The tie of blood had vanished —

had existed only in the boy's mind. In the little living room the boy paused and laid his hand on the man's arm. "What is it, son?"

"That's it. That's just it." It was a sob rather than a voice. The man glanced at the boyish face, working in the pain of emotion which finds no words. "Whatever this message is, I want you to know that you are 'dad' always. I can't tell you what I feel. I don't know yet myself, but you've always been 'dad' to me and you always will be. Just as I want always to be 'son' to you. That will be all right, won't it,— dad?"

There were tears in the man's eyes, too, as he answered: "Dad and son!" he whispered. "Dad and son! Yes, always. Surely we can claim that much from our twenty years together. Dad and son!"

He crossed the room to the quaint old desk that held his few papers, his account books, the insurance policy of the house and barn, the deed to the farm, and from a drawer that Chris had never seen unlocked before he drew a long, yellow envelope, sealed and bound with a faded blue ribbon. On the outside was written, "To my son. To be opened when he is ready to shoulder his burden."

"To shoulder my burden," the boy repeated slowly, as he held the envelope almost fearfully in his hand.

"You'll learn that too," was the man's answer. "It's your father's story. He has the right to

tell you. When you have read it, call me. I shall be outside."

He was gone and Chris stood alone, holding his father's message in his hands. It was the key to the lost years, the key that would unlock the inner secret of his life, but as he stood there he was conscious of nothing but the slow ticking of the old clock and caught himself wondering idly if his father had forgotten to wind it. His father! Why, this was all that was left of his father, this senseless packet of ink and paper that he held in his hand. He opened it and began to read:

"My dear son," so the letter began in formal fashion. "I find it somehow very hard to tell you what I have to say, very hard to believe that the curly-haired baby who is playing on the floor at my feet as I write will be a man grown when he reads this letter. I have just come from the doctor's and he has told me that I have only a little while to live, a month at the outside, he said, with the brutal kindness of his profession. Most doctors are fools, but this one has told me the truth. A month into which to crowd what I thought I should have years for!

"I am sorry that I must drop out of your life so quickly, but I'm glad, too, to pass all the milestones in one quick spurt. Perhaps when you read this, or after, you will know something of the reasons for my gladness — God grant not

from your own life, though. I would have borne the burden of living as cheerfully as I could for your sake, and I lay it down gladly for my own.

"I have many regrets, my son, now that I look back from the edge of things. I have made many mistakes, being human, and I have sinned, but not, I hope, beyond pardon. But I have lived to the top of my strength and I have had a year and a half of perfect happiness — so perfect that Heaven was jealous of it.

"I am leaving you in what most men would call 'comfortable circumstances.' You will be rich, not boundlessly, but far beyond any ordinary risk of need. My father, your grandfather, laid in toil and self-sacrifice the foundation of the fortune I am passing on to you, larger and sounder even than when I received it. This is yours now, an opportunity and an obligation.

"It is this fortune that makes me regret to leave you. The children of the poor are not always the unfortunate ones. They must work, whether they like it or not, and work keeps more men out of jail than fear of the law. I am not one of those who believe wealth a necessary curse. I could not face my father in the next world if I had left this with such a belief in my mind. Ours is clean money, my boy. I want you to know that.

"But I want you to know, too, that it is the man who taints the money as often as the money taints the man. If I thought that you would

grow up an idle spendthrift, a rich man's son with the tastes of a roué and the intellect of a croupier, death would be a bitter draft to me. I have seen them, those wasters of the second and third generation, without energy enough to be positively vicious and lacking the brains to be dangerous to anyone but themselves. I do not believe your mother's son could be like that. Her white soul must throw a gleam into her son's life, even across the great gap.

"Blood will have its way, and yours is good blood. Still I must take no risks. It is not money alone — mere senseless sticks and stones and whirling wheels — that I am passing on to you, but human lives. In the Christopher Mills, here in Doncaster, to-day fifteen hundred men are working and in the cottages of the town at least four or five times that number of women and children look to the mills for their daily bread. They are yours. You can make or mar them. The only thing you cannot, dare not, do is to leave them alone. Some of the men knew your grandfather and worked under him. Some of them may be still there when you come into your kingdom.

"I want you to be ready to shoulder that burden. Money will buy brains, but it won't buy human sympathy and understanding. Walcott, who is managing the mills now, knows all that any man needs to know about making steel. When he dies — and he will not leave the works

before — another man can be hired to take his place, but there is not enough money in the world to buy the qualities that a man must have who is to give these people of ours a chance to live as well as to work.

"I want you to have these qualities and what I am about to do I do because I believe it is the surest way to give them to you. When I am dead, 'in a month at the outside,' my friend — and your mother's — will take you away from here to some quiet country place where there will be no chance of his seeing anyone who ever knew him or me. He will change his name and yours and you will be dead to the world into which you were born, even to the woman who took a mother's place to your mother and from whose house we were married, your mother and I. You will be brought up to believe that you are the son of the farmer that my friend will become. You will grow up out-of-doors, strong in body and mind, clean-souled, wholesome. In due time you will be sent to college, not one of the educational palaces of the East as rich in endowment as they are poverty-stricken in ideals, where the students are only less worldly wise than the professors, but to some remote inland school, poor enough to be honest with its students, but with money enough to teach them all they need to know; old enough to have worthy traditions but not wedded to the past.

"Then you will be told the truth about your-

self. The rest is in your own hands. I shall have done all that I can. It will be your part to prove that I have done well. I can trust the man to whom I give you as I would trust myself. I know that he will write nothing but good words on the tablet of your life and I know too that I could give you no better standard by which to measure your own growth.

"Oh, Jack, Jack," to the boy, despite the unaccustomed name, it was his father's voice calling to him across the chasm, "I have struggled to see you as you will be in twenty years, but it is dark and doubtful. We parents, living and dead, strive to the utmost to do the best thing for our children, but in the end it is a petty gift we offer them. They are compounded of our strength and our weakness, the fruit of soil that has been fertilized or poisoned by the good or evil deeds of all the generations of the past. I gave my boy the best mother boy ever had and I have tried to do my share.

"But it is you who must take yourself as the years and your own surroundings have made you and shape the future or be molded by it. Good or ill, I have done my work. Another month — less than a month — and I shall be through with it all. A long life to you, little man, and may its end prove the wisdom of its beginning. Good-by, God bless you.

"Your loving father,

"John Christopher."

It was finished. The mystery was no longer. He knew himself for John Christopher, the third of the name, the last of the Christopher steel makers, and not Christopher Dunham, the son of a plain Illinois farmer, with high ambitions for the future — and little else. Wealth was his and power. He was set a ruler over men, one of the princes of industry. He raised his head proudly at the thought. The world unfolded before him its alluring prospect. Was ever boy to be so envied? It was like a fairy tale. All the elements were there, the missing heir, the long years of absence, the kingdom waiting patiently for its king, the mystery slowly passing out of men's minds, to be revived now and again as one of the impenetrable secrets that men wonder over in idle moments and newspapers glance at occasionally as problems that have baffled curiosity.

Now it would all be made plain. To-morrow the world should know that the missing heir to the Christopher fortune had been found on an Illinois farm. Young Lochinvar would come out of the West — not to claim his own and ride away again — but to mount the throne and seize the scepter. It intoxicated him, and it saddened him too. "A long life to you, little man, and may its end prove the wisdom of its beginning," his father had said.

Well, he would not fail. He would wield the scepter firmly but with wisdom; mercy should temper his justice. No man should say that the last

of the Christophers was unworthy of the name. He was young and he found himself suddenly on a height which men reach usually only after long climbing and come to worn with effort and soiled with the dust and mire of the way. So much vainglory can be pardoned to confident youth, intoxicated by the sudden vision of power.

He strode to the door and flung it wide, the insolent pride of youth in every movement.

"Come in, dad. I've read the letter. Come in."

James Dunham's smile was melancholy as he caught the flushed, eager look of the boy. His work was finished, but would the result prove the wisdom of the experiment? He had kept faith with his friend and with the woman he loved, but his burden was not to be laid aside with a word or the delivery of a letter twenty years old. The boy's father had faced the future across a gap of many years. Dunham stood on its dim edge. The task he had carried through was not one to be defined in sealed and signed contracts or ended when a specified day had come.

Human lives may not be nourished carefully and cherished warmly through a third of a long lifetime and then delivered to the world, C. O. D., and forgotten as so much live stock or dead merchandise. Some jealous pride was in the man's mind. Whatever else his father and mother had done for him, however they might loom in the boy's imagination in the years to

come, he, James Dunham, Harry Lowcroft he had been before the change, had had him for his own through twenty years. The boy's mind had been his to mold and mature; his soul had been his to guard and vitalize. If the result was good, was there not something to be written down to his foster father's credit because of that? The boy's parents would be but dim figures of the imagination, romantic, tender, appealing images of the mind. He, the *de facto* father for two decades, would be at least a warm reality of the memory.

It was not his friend or the woman that the man was jealous of. From the first he had seen himself a poor, dreamy knight-errant for the woman of his love. For her sake he had cherished the boy as his own, for her sake and then for the boy's own. His jealousy was for the greedy, foolish, gaping, sensation-loving world that would herald the young John Christopher as a new nine-days' wonder, a figure of romance in an age of grim reality. Reporters would interview him and photograph him and their newspapers would print columns about him — at least until the next great calamity or international marriage or rumor of foreign war should clamor for space. And he, James Dunham, the man who had kept his word and made this wonder a reality, he would be only the old man with whom the young heir to the Christopher millions had lived in his youth.

There was humor as well as pathos in the situation. Afterwards Dunham reflected that even the martyrs may have smiled at the thought of how they were fooling the world that burned them to-day and would work miracles with their ashes to-morrow. All these things, and more, were in the man's mind as he passed into the narrow, low-ceilinged room where the boy had learned the way back to his own secret, but his greeting was brief.

"Now you know, then."

"Yes, I know, but there are a thousand things more that I want to find out. I know that I own big steel mills at Doncaster and that my father left me a great deal of money." There was quite an air of the young lord of the manor in his tone, which the elder man did not fail to note.

"But who has been managing them? What has become of all the money they've been making? How can I prove that I am John Christopher?"

"Easy, son, easy." Man and boy held without conscious effort to the "dad" and "son" of their agreement. "Walcott has been managing the mills as he did in your father's time, and managing them well, I think. The property has been administered by three trustees of whom Walcott is one, Henry Phœnix, your father's lawyer, another, and Burke Graham, president of the Doncaster National Bank, the third. Naturally these men have been in the secret. To have placed it in the keeping of only one man, and that man an

obscure farmer, would have been an insane risk. Once a year I have written to Phœnix and twice a year to Walcott and they have replied, sending their letters to the care of the Farmers' and Mechanics' Bank in Chatham.

"Every care has been taken that you should have no hint of a chain binding you to any other past than that which you could remember, and yet the way back has been kept open. Neither of these three men was to make any effort to see you or communicate with you. Naturally a seal of strict silence was placed on their lips. Oh, you have been guarded, son."

"But I did get a hint, once or twice, didn't I, dad?" The boy's tone was jubilant. "I'd have found out in time myself."

"You mean the woman by the road?"

"Yes, dad. Who was she?"

"She was the woman with whom your mother lived as a girl, son. Your father and mother were married from her house. She held you on her lap a hundred times when you were a little shaver. When you disappeared after your father died, she moved heaven and earth to find you. I guess Phœnix and Graham had a pretty hard time keeping their lips closed when she tried to pry them apart.

"That was once when I was frightened, son. If I had thought there was any chance of her coming back this way I'd have packed you off somewhere till the danger blew over. She knew you,

but she wasn't quite sure enough to risk going farther. Was that the only hint you had?"

The two were like children harking back to the various critical points in a game of hide and seek. Eager, interested, amused, they searched their memories. "Well, there were little things, of course, here and there, times when I couldn't understand something you said or did. Once, I remember, I asked you the difference between steel and iron. You told me a lot about the process by which the carbon is taken out of the raw iron and how the steel is melted and rolled and forged into finished shapes. Then you looked at me in a funny way and you said, I can remember it as clearly as though it were yesterday, you said, 'Some day, you'll learn that they make gold out of iron, too!'

"I puzzled over that a lot till I found an old story about an alchemist who spent his life trying to turn iron into gold. I thought you knew everything and I was sure that you had found out the trick of alchemy and were only waiting till you had enough iron to begin on. Maybe you remember the time. For weeks I gathered up all the old iron I could find, barrel hoops and horseshoes and old bolts and wagon tires, and piled them back of the woodshed. I was helping you get the iron to make gold out of."

"Yes, I remember, I remember now. I couldn't imagine what you were up to. What a funny, serious little tike you were."

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The man's eyes were a little dim at the picture the foolish, simple incident conjured up in his brain,— the sober, freckle-faced, bare-legged youngster struggling with a rusty wagon tire half as heavy as himself. He had thought it a child's game, a frolic of the imagination. In reality it had been actuated by a very serious desire to help "dad." And now this boy fronted the task of turning iron into gold without his help.

"Was that all?" the man asked.

"No, there were other times, but most of them didn't amount to much. But there was one last winter, dad. I told you about it at the time."

"H. Anisty Norton?"

The boy nodded. "Mr. Norton knew me, dad, I knew he did. Don't you remember? He told me I wouldn't take a place in his office. At least, if he didn't know me, he's a good suspecter."

"Yes, son. He knew you. When he got back to New York he wrote Henry Phœnix that he had seen the missing Christopher. Phœnix wrote me at once to know what Norton meant. He seemed to think I had put you on exhibition somewhere and was letting people see you at so much per see."

"And what did you say?"

"I told him that Norton had not only seen you but had offered you a place in his office. I think Phœnix's calm legal temper must have boiled at the thought of the heir to the Christopher millions

adding up figures and running errands for H. Anisty Norton. Then I told him to cheer up. Norton never told a secret prematurely in his life — his own or anybody else's. He hoards bits of knowledge as a miser hoards pieces of gold. Only he knows how to use them, too, when the time comes. If I had been trying to keep you out of your fortune permanently I might have been worried, but as you were nearly through your apprenticeship of poverty and obscurity I didn't lose much sleep over it."

"Then you used to know him?"

"Didn't I refuse to go with you when he gave you his lordly permission to wait on him in the president's office? He was the man who was with the woman you saw along the road years ago. She was his mother. You'll see him again, many times after you go to Doncaster. Son, son, be careful of him. I'm not going to give you any good advice. I've been doing that in one way or another for twenty years. If it hasn't sunk in in that time, there isn't much chance of doing any good in the few days we have left. But keep your eyes open and your lips closed when you're with him. He was in love with your mother once, which isn't remarkable. In fact it's a good item on the credit side of his books. His mother brought your mother up, but your mother distrusted and feared him, even as a boy.

"He is a great man now, a combination of Crœsus, Mæcenas, and Benjamin Franklin, with

a dash of Nero. He is ranked as one of the richest men in the world and college presidents stand in line in his office waiting to tell him how worthy — and hard up — are the institutions they represent. Occasionally he deigns to speak in public, as he did last winter, but usually his money talks for him. Sometime I suppose we'll learn what it really was that brought him out here last winter.

"You will hear and perhaps see much of him in the East. He has wealth, a strong will, unscrupulous strength of mind and body, and the knowledge of the world which keeps a man from more open violation of social and moral codes than is always permitted great wealth and great genius. But here and there you will hear men curse him under their breath, and a few women, too, I am told. The latter you will not hear. Great, respectable, publicly religious as he is, there is something malign about him, something that saps the strength of even the men he patronizes and protects. His shadow breeds a moral miasma. Your mother knew it and shunned it. Your father laughed at her prejudice, but he did not make Norton one of the trustees for the Christopher Mills as he might well have done.

"That's all, Chris. I didn't intend such a long tirade. You may never need my advice, but if you do, here it is. I think I'll call it an Old Man's Last Words to His Son Just Before Go-

ing to Bed at the End of a Long and Wearing Day. The title is longer than the 'words,' which would be a good fault in some books, but these are the words: 'Keep your mind as clean as your hands, pay your debts, and look out for H. Anisty Norton.'"

CHAPTER VII

IN HIS KINGDOM

IT would be pleasant to record the triumphal home-coming of young John Christopher, to paint in glowing colors the welcoming arches and the streaming banners, to describe the plaudits of the villagers of Doncaster and the deep shouts of the brawny millmen, to recall to mind the roses which the children strewed in his path, to revivify down to the minutest detail the acclaim with which the young lord of the manor was greeted on his return from his twenty-year exile. The reason none of those things is here set down is that none of them happened.

The last of the Christophers came to Doncaster unheralded and unknown. Alone he stepped down on the platform of the little station sleeping in the August sunshine and stood, with his bags at his feet, gazing about him. So James Dunham, the wise, had ordained it should be. The station lay at the mouth of a long valley. Westward stretched a single dusty street, lined with the low store buildings and one-story houses. Across the street from the station the Doncaster House towered three stories in air. In the shade of its long veranda sat the usual conference of vil-

lage worthies, their chairs tilted against the wall, their jaws busy with the universal national pastimes of politics and tobacco.

At the upper end of the dusty street, a full mile from the station, were the Christopher Mills, a vast, formless, sprawling black blotch against the hillside. Smoke poured steadily from the tall chimneys and as Christopher looked, a gush of heavier vapor, shot through with orange flame, visible even in the yellow sunshine, belched from the squat chimney of a furnace. That, then, was his welcome home, those far-flung banners of smoke, that leaping panache of flame.

Southward on the hills the roof of a great house loomed above the tree tops, its tiles throwing back the sunlight from a thousand bright surfaces. Thus the home of the Christophers had looked down at the smoky, dusty cauldron of a valley for two generations and well into a third. It was a sight to stir even the most phlegmatic, this proud estate of valley and hill, village and mill and manor house, and young John Christopher was far from stolidity. But through the warmth of pride and exultation that swept over him he was conscious of a chill of uneasiness. Was this his after all? To be sure the title was in his name, the profits had been piling up for him for twenty years, the scepter of power was in his hands, but did he belong here? The half-naked men who toiled in his mill, the loafers on the veranda of the hotel that stood on his land,

the ragged children who played in the street that his grandfather had given to be a highway so long as human feet should tread it, were they not more at home than he?

Half an hour before he had been the young prince on the threshold of his kingdom, confident of his power, sure of his welcome. Now he was sure of nothing but this queer feeling of insecurity, confident with the uneasy confidence of the newcomer who is determined to stay until his presence becomes one of the accepted facts.

He shrugged his shoulders in amused contempt at his own weakness. This was his, and he had come to stay. Home was home, but just then he was not a little homesick for dad and the prairie country, and the old house with Hilda droning her sad, Swedish chant of joy inside. For a sickening second he wished that Fate had been content to leave him a farmer — or had never led him to think himself one. Then that feeling passed, too, and he was conscious of nothing but his immediate duty.

He turned to the slouching, coatless station agent.

"Can I leave these bags here while I go up to the mills?"

"Sure thing," with a genial nonchalance. "Want a rig? It's a long walk on a hot day."

"No, thanks. I need the exercise."

The agent turned away indifferently. John Christopher was tempted to declare himself, to

announce casually, "I am John Christopher, come to take over my mills," or at least to remark easily, "My name is Christopher," and note the result. He could imagine the agent's stare of surprise, the respect that would creep into his voice, the "sir" that would supplement his answer to haughty questions, the curve that would show itself in his backbone.

But he had promised dad that he would keep his identity concealed until he should appear before Walcott and the two other trustees who awaited him at the mills. So his enjoyment of the agent's surprise and humble obeisance must be imaginary only. Perhaps it was as well that he did not make the experiment. Humility is a garment that sets ill on the shoulders of the average American station agent.

Twenty minutes later John Christopher stood at the threshold of the mills — his mills. A high wooden fence surrounded the sprawling buildings. Through the great gateway guarded by the sign, "No admittance except on Business," he saw a wide yard and beyond were doors into the mills themselves. Through the openings he caught glimpses of bare bodies flitting to and fro in a smoky obscurity lighted by flashes of flame. His ears were smitten by the clang of heavy hammers and the roar of furnaces. The air, even there in the gateway, was thick with the smell of smoke and the sulphurous reek of molten iron. Men hurried to and fro in the yard, heaving heavy

pigs of iron into sheet-iron wheelbarrows with which other men toiled up long inclines to the maw of a great furnace gaping for its daily meal of iron and coke and limestone. Others struggled with huge beams of finished steel destined to take their place in spidery bridge or towering skyscraper.

It was the beginning and the end of that modern alchemy of industry which young John saw. On the one hand were the baser metals pouring into the hungry furnaces; on the other a creaking steam crane swung out of a gap in the wall which fronted the yard the structural steel from which the Christopher gold was minted. The boy had seen mills before, but nothing so vast, so basic, as this. And it was his — all his — mills, and furnaces, and creaking cranes, and finished steel. These toiling figures in the sunlit yard and those other half-naked gnomes in the smoky caves beyond, they were his vassals.

He turned and knocked at the door beside the great gate, where the word "Office" was painted across the pine panels.

He heard a heavy step within and the door was flung open. A gray-mustached, heavy-shouldered man stood in the doorway and stared at John curiously, half with apprehension.

"I want to see Mr. Walcott," said the young man.

"I am Mr. Walcott," replied he of the gray mustache. "You are —"

"I am John Christopher."

The deed was done. The lost heir had returned. Gentlemen, the King!

Walcott stretched out a broad hand. "We were expecting you," he said simply. "I would have met you at the train, but your — Mr. Dunham thought it was better that we should meet here. Come in. The others are waiting."

He led John through the outer room, where a girl with brown hair glanced up from a typewriter as they passed. As they entered the inner office guarded by the word "Private" on the door, two other elderly men rose and came forward to meet him.

"Mr. Graham and Mr. Phœnix, your lawyer and your banker, and your other two trustees." That was all the introduction, and no more was needed. John saw two men well past middle age, their eyes fixed on him with the same look of curiosity and apprehension that he had seen in Walcott's at the outer door. Phœnix, the lawyer, well-dressed with the easy unostentation of New York tailoring, keen eyes gleaming behind eye-glasses, white teeth showing below a close-clipped, gray mustache, was the first to speak after the introduction.

"We are glad to be the first to welcome you back, Mr. Christopher. It's been a long wait, but we've done our best for you."

"I'm sure of that." The boy's response was hearty. The deferential manner of these older

men pleased his pride and steadied the beating of his pulse.

The banker's welcome was more florid. His flowing side-whiskers, loosely flapping linen coat, and well-developed waist line, bespoke the prosperous village magnate, easy-going, comfortable, anxious to be friends with all where friendship added to the ease of living. "Your father's son needs no welcome here, sir," he said as he held the young man's hand. "And I think your bank account will show that the mills have not been idle. But they have needed a head, sir, they have needed a head." Walcott glanced up keenly and perhaps a little jealously at that. Graham saw the glance and went smoothly on. "Walcott is the best steel-maker in the country — none better — but a mill without an owner is like a ship without a captain, however expert a navigator the mate may be. The Christopher Mills without a Christopher are 'Hamlet' with Hamlet left out."

The joke was grayer than its maker, but it made a suave conclusion to the little speech of welcome.

"Thank you, all of you. I know something of what you've done for me. Mr. Dunham has told me how you have taken my father's place here and kept the secret. But I'm glad to be back. I want to take my father's place now."

It was a boyish speech for all its stiffness of phrase and the one it touched most deeply was Walcott, the hard-fisted manager of the mills.

He only bowed. The lawyer nodded his head curtly, his keen eyes watching the boy the while. The banker bent suavely at the well-developed waist line and rubbed his hands. "Very natural, I'm sure. And very commendable, too, if I may say so." No one objecting, he gazed blandly about the room and sat down as though the motion were carried, *nem. con.*

The other two eyed John in appraisal as he walked across the room to take a seat by the open window. They saw a clean-faced young man of twenty-two with straight body and limbs, a pair of shoulders that filled his coat well, clear gray eyes and a nose and chin that hinted at strength of will. To Walcott who remembered the boy's father when he too was twenty-two it was as though the years had been blotted out. The John Christopher who had found him a puddler and left him a manager stood before him in the flesh.

"You will want to know what we've been doing with your mills, Mr. Christopher," he said. "It will take time to tell you everything, but we can begin whenever you are ready."

"If you don't mind I'd rather wait a day or two," was the boy's answer. "I'm a little dizzy yet. You know I've only known about them a week and I haven't got used to them yet. I want to know the men. Can't I see them and talk to some of them?"

Walcott nodded. "You can see them any

time — now if you want. I don't know about talking to them." He was feeling his way carefully. He knew the mill hand, his quick, suspicious resentment of patronage, his detestation of the hand stretched downward from the upper ranks, and he was not sure enough of this fresh-faced lad, who had already the bearing of a master of men.

"Why can't I talk to them? They'll want to see me, won't they?" Evidently the picture of the arches and the welcoming villagers had not quite faded from his mind.

"Oh, yes, of course." And "Of course," echoed the banker. The lawyer said nothing.

"You see," Walcott went on slowly, "they're not the easiest lot to tackle till you know them. Many of them are foreigners and suspect everything they don't understand. And as they don't understand much of anything except their jobs and pay-day, their suspicion is fairly comprehensive."

"But the others — the native-born?"

"I don't know but they're even worse than the foreigners. Most of them have a smattering of half-baked ideas about political economy with a little socialism thrown in that they've picked up from union papers and at the meetings, and they're inclined to be distrustful of bosses — even of me sometimes."

He could not tell this eager boy, with the Christopher nose and chin and his mother's eyes,

of the snatches of talk that he had overheard at the luncheon hour and about the village in the week since the news had gone abroad that the last of the Christophers had been found and was on his way back to the mills.

Crude jokes, heavy with scorn, had been cracked at the expense of the hayseed boss who was coming. One old man had balanced a hot coal on his pipe between a horny thumb and finger and grunted out between puffs: "Reckon he'll be thinkin' we ought to use pitchforks at the rolls and yell 'Gee, haw, whoa, Buck' at the crane men." The circle about him had laughed harshly and filled in the picture with profanely contemptuous details. There had been no hint or danger of open opposition. He could have checked that with a heavy hand. But the murmuring undercurrent of silent distrust was more insidious and far more to be feared.

Walcott's own position was none too easy. The men knew and trusted him. His twenty years of unbroken rule counted heavily in his favor. He knew them, and he let them alone so long as they did their work. That was their verdict of approval for him. But a Christopher stood before him and sought an introduction to the men of the Christopher Mills. Could he grant the request without forever losing his prestige among the men? On the other hand could he refuse it without incurring the dislike or arousing the jealousy of his new master and so ending

his usefulness as manager? He had anticipated problems, but not so soon.

Meanwhile John Christopher stood waiting. Walcott nodded. "If you'll come out this way, I can take you through the mills, and perhaps we'll have a chance to talk to some of the men. Will you excuse us, gentlemen?" to the others.

In the outer office, where John caught a glimpse through an open door of a larger room where a score or more of clerks bent over great ledgers on high desks, Walcott paused and spoke to the brown-haired girl at the typewriter. "Just a moment, Eve. My daughter, Mr. Christopher. Also my stenographer and secretary and general right-hand man."

The girl's face flushed at the praise, but Christopher bowed perfunctorily, touched her hand in tentative acknowledgment of the introduction, and made brief mention of his great pleasure at the meeting. A young prince on his way to the first view of his people has little time or attention to waste on brown-haired stenographers.

When the two men had passed on into the yard there was a variety of opinions expressed and suppressed by the three persons left behind in the two offices. Graham, the banker, spread his hands before his well-developed waist line, finger tips touching, and murmured in his smooth voice: "A very attractive young man. V-e-r-y attractive, indeed. Shouldn't wonder if our old friend

Christopher's idea was turning out better than we had feared."

Phœnix, the lawyer, said nothing, but he thought of that firm nose and chin and the steady way in which those gray eyes had regarded Walcott, and he felt sorry for Walcott.

In the outer office the brown-haired stenographer wrinkled her nose at the door through which her father and the young master had passed and remarked very much to herself:

"Stuck-up thing! He needn't shake hands if he doesn't want to. He may be a Christopher, but his coat collar kicks up in the back and he ought to have someone else buy his neckties for him."

From which it may be gathered that Miss Eve had a will of her own and also a way of expressing it.

CHAPTER VIII

WHOM THE GODS WOULD DESTROY

IT is a wise dispensation of Providence that usually denies power to youth and inexperience. The mistakes of age are negative and merely corollaries to acts which the world approves. Therefore, they are little noticed and soon forgotten. Youth ascends to the house tops and trumpets forth its errors brazenly and in the sight of all men, congratulating itself the while on its wisdom and tact to give the proper action its appropriate setting of time and place. And men jeer or mourn according as their temperaments and private desires move them; in either case friends and foes join hands in a great conspiracy to the end that that particular indiscretion shall be remembered against the author of it forever. All of which is but a prelude to a statement of the painful fact that young John Christopher chose the mill yard when the men were pouring through it at six o'clock as the time and place to make a stump speech to his "people," welcoming himself to Doncaster.

Walcott had guided him through the orderly riot of the mills for two deafening, dizzying hours. At first the uproar and confusion had ap-

palled him. He had shrunk from the glare of the converters where the roaring rush of air-blasts through the tuyères had filled the smoky vault with white flame and sparks that fell in showers. The swinging ladles of molten metal, driven irresistibly by hydraulic power that sent or held them at a touch, had filled his brain with thoughts of the unpleasant results that would follow if the tilting converter tilted a foot too far or the swinging ladle swung too near or not near enough. Walcott's answer to his question if such a thing ever happened was not reassuring.

"Never but once to the same gang," the manager said with brevity.

The rolls were a little better, but the swift glide to and fro of the white-hot rails, curling, twisting, darting in and out like fiery serpents, suggested the possibility of a new Laocoon if one stepped too near or the operator at the lever faltered in his regard for a moment. The construction shop pleased him most, and he stood entranced at the spectacle of silent-footed electricity, driving purring, squealing machines that punched, planed, reamed, and bored, whirling chips and slivers of steel as easily as a carpenter drives his keen tools through the friendly pine. These were processes that he could understand. Those other flaming, roaring, spark-spitting marvels were too much like the volcanic processes of Nature by which mountains are born and islands scattered in the seas. It seemed a repetition of

the fiery chemistry of the world's birth that had cast the iron ore in the earth's mold, and it shocked him out of the complacent sense of power and satisfaction that he had felt when he came into the outer yard.

And the men — naked to the waist, toiling prodigiously with bar and shovel and tongs, thrusting, tugging, and heaving, running and shouting in what seemed wild confusion, yet always produced the desired result, sweat pouring from their bodies — these seemed not so much human beings as wierd creatures of another age, troglodytes of industry, half gnome and half salamander. Their bodies were impervious to heat and their eyes fronted the glare unwinkingly. They toiled daily at Death's elbow, separated from the fires of Hell by a shell of steel and fire-brick. The devil's broth that they swung back and forth above their heads, that ran like water in the ladles or darted, fiery-serpent-wise, between the rolls at their behest, was the basic stuff of earth, fashioned from the core of the planets, but they faced it without fear, played with it, laughed at it. Through their hands was passing the heart of mountains which presently would lie in shining parallel lines to bear hurrying trains, would form the frame and strength of those trains, would lift feeble, city-bred men and women twenty, thirty, forty stories into the air, would even be fashioned cunningly into staunch hulls to carry the blessings of peace or the curse of war

to the nations. The mightiest weapons, the most ponderous engines, the most delicate tools would be formed from it. It would give the weakest soldier power to snuff out his brother's life two miles away and with its aid roughly gentle surgeons would bring back life from the valley of the shadow. At a touch it would hurl a thousand pounds of itself into a sleeping town or crash through the ribs of a floating fortress on the rim of the sea. At another touch, as delicate, fine threads of it would thrill around the globe with news of birth or death, of the overthrow of kings or the mistakes of democracy.

These men who drove or watched or held were sponsors at the rebirth of the world. Under their care the earth became fluid again as in remote geological periods, too far away to be reckoned save in millions of years; it raged in primeval torment and suffered again the birth pains of Creation. And in the end it passed forth, the product of the modern alchemy, to bear witness to the might of man who for his weakness, more than for his meekness, has inherited the earth.

It would be folly to suppose that all, or much of this ran through John Christopher's mind as he followed at Walcott's heels through the chaos over which he was to rule. The feeling that he was most conscious of, when he began to recover his breath, was exultation. He, John Christopher, some time son of an Illinois farmer, was set in command over this kingdom of discordant

harmony, of orderly disorder. Where he stood, his father had stood before him, and his father's father before that. He would not have exchanged places with George V, by the grace of God, King, and the rest of it, and the Czar of all the Russias could not have tempted him. This was his conclusion in the comparative quiet of the construction shop.

In only one respect was his experience a disappointment. He had not created the stir among his people that he had expected. The welcoming arches and the cheering villagers were still present in the back of his mind. These men were serious, busy, desperately in earnest. A few here and there had glanced at him without pausing in their work. Once or twice shouts of "Gangway!" "One side there!" had reminded him that he was blocking the wheels of industry. The tones had been neither respectful nor rude; they voiced only the unconscious abruptness of men who must be about their business.

He had expected to speak to some of them kindly, but from a height, as master to man, to hold their brawny hands in a firm clasp which would assure them of his intention to deal with them firmly but with mercy. The idea seemed a joke, a delicious absurdity, as he stood in the glare of the roaring converters. As well attempt to patronize a two-hundred-ton locomotive on the successful completion of its day's run as to pat these sweating sons of Martha on the shoulder

and assure them that their joys and sorrows were his.

In the comparative quiet of the construction shop the idea had not seemed so absurd and when they reached the open air again it was quite possible. He drew a long breath of fresh air. Walcott glanced at him quizzically.

"Well, what do you think of it, Mr. Christopher? Easier to breathe out here, isn't it?"

John nodded. "Just a little. How do they do it? I'd think they'd suffocate."

"Oh, no. It isn't so bad when you get used to it. Some never do though. A man soon finds his place here, as he does everywhere else. The men at the converters and the rolls are picked men physically. The weaker ones soon give it up. If they don't, it kills them sooner or later. A rolling-mill hand isn't a good risk."

John stared at him, but the manager's face was calm. It was not a brutal assertion of the survival of the fittest that he was making — merely a statement of an accepted fact as though he had said: "Steel rails cost nineteen dollars a ton to make and put down in San Francisco."

"But can't it be changed — the conditions, I mean? Can't the men have better air to work in?"

"Perhaps. It's better now than it was when I first knew it. But steel-making isn't a kid-glove affair, you know, any more than fighting is a Sunday-school picnic. The men know the risks, and

they're pretty careful — when they don't forget. Then something happens and the others are careful — for a while."

The last of the Christophers threw up his head. "Well, I'll find a way to change it. I don't intend to have my men working in death traps."

Walcott flushed at this implied criticism of his own attitude toward the work, but whatever he might have said was cut off by the screaming of the whistle above the boiler-room. The noise within slackened on the instant. The rolls ceased to grind, the cranes and ladles swung to a standstill, the clatter of riveters and punches and hammers in the construction shop ceased. It was six o'clock and another day's work was done. Only the converters and the furnaces roared on. Day and night were alike to them. The men who tended them gave place to others, but the machines took no account of daylight or darkness.

Men came pouring out of open doorways, putting on shirts or blouses as they came, lunch pails dangling from their arms, their eyes blinking at the sunlight. A sudden inspiration came to John and he was at the other side of the yard and standing by the great gate before Walcott hardly knew that he had moved. The men poured across the open space toward the young master. Something in the way he stood, head held high, right hand uplifted, face set in a serious frown, caught their attention and those nearest the gate

stopped. Those behind, checked by the halting of the front rank, stopped in turn and the movement outward came to a gradual end. The yard was nearly filled with grimy, sweating figures, standing as though arrested by a sudden word of command, their faces turned toward the boy by the gate, raised slightly above their heads by the I-beam on which he stood. For a brief second they stared at each other, master and men.

The tardy ones that came hurrying out into the yard found their rush checked by this unexpected sight and their questions brought only a growl of "Shut up!" "How the hell do I know?" as they pushed forward into the rear of the crowd. Walcott, caught in the rush of workmen, could only frown impatiently and wonder what miracle of rashness was about to be performed.

Then John Christopher made his speech of welcome to himself, the first indiscretion in a career that was not to be marked by discretion or foresight.

"I don't think I need to introduce myself," he began. "I am John Christopher, your"—he groped for the right word and found the wrong one—"your master. I have come back to take my father's place, and I just want to tell you how glad I am to be here. This is a great institution and we are all part of it—you as well as I. I want you to know at the outset that I am one of you—" Walcott heard a man near him mutter, "Cut it out! Keep that for the Sun-

day-school kids," but most of them stood fast and waited.

"I know your lives are hard," the young man went on, "but I think we can make them easier. We must work together to that end. All I ask now is your help. I don't know much about making steel, but Mr. Walcott will look after that part of it. What I want to do is to look after your minds and your — your "—again the search for the right word and the finding of the wrong one —" your souls."

"I'm not going to make a long speech." There were a few low, ironical cheers on the outskirts of the crowd but they failed to reach the speaker's ears. "All I want now is your help in my efforts to help you. If we'll work together, we can make Doncaster the finest mill town in the country. It's what my father would have wanted, and I'm sure none of us can do better than follow what we believe would have been his wishes."

The speech was finished and the speaker stepped down and stood by the gate. The crowd held back irresolutely for a moment as though waiting for a word of command. Walcott heard a buzz of low-toned comment break out around him. "Talks like the parson, don't 'a, Jem?" "It's free baths and a cut in wages he's meanin'." "We'll be opening the converters with prayer next thing." One remark not meant for his ears reached the manager. "He's

right about old Walcott, but the kid's bit off more'n he kin chew."

Then the crowd surged forward through the gateway. John stood fast and reached out his hand as they came crowding by. A few nearest him took it limply and shamefacedly, but most of them hurried past, intent only on getting away from a situation which they suspected covered a trap of some sort.

As the last of his "people" disappeared around the corner of the high fence John turned to the manager who came slowly up.

"Well, I did get a chance to speak to them, after all, didn't I?" There was not a little triumph in the glance he threw at Walcott. "It's all right. I knew it would be. They're a little shy yet, but as soon as they know that I mean to be square with them, they'll be with me, heart and soul. Don't you think so, Miss Walcott?"

The brown-haired stenographer had come to the door of the office opening into the yard as soon as she had detected the strange lull in the usual tumult of quitting time, and had heard the whole of the little speech.

"I don't know. What are you going to do?" The young man blushed at the bluntness of the question.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I don't quite know myself. I've been reading up a little on what's been done at other places and I've always been

very much interested in the relations of capital and labor. What do you think about it, Mr. Walcott?"

The manager shook his head slowly. "Don't ask me. I don't know much about such things myself. I've been through half a dozen strikes, little and big, and I've been pretty busy keeping the mills going and seeing that the steel was up to the contract specifications. Theories are all right, Mr. Christopher, and I'm not saying anything against books, but when you've a big forfeit posted and the time's getting short, you don't think much about doing the best you can for the men. About all you can do is to pay the top scale and see that they don't run any more risks than are necessary."

"Then you don't agree with my plans?"

"I don't say that, Mr. Christopher. I don't know what they are, and if you will pardon a little plain speech from an old man, you'll wait a bit before you make any. I'm with you in whatever you do, remember that."

"I know, I know. You've been a faithful servant and I'll not forget it. Perhaps we can find a way to lighten some of your burdens." He glanced at his watch. "How long a walk is it from here to the — home?"

"Ten minutes at the outside. Shall I send someone with you to show you the way?"

"No, thanks. I'd rather find it myself, if you'll show me the road, if you don't mind.

You see, I'm — that is — well, it's home, you know. I'm really going home for the first time in my life and I'd a little rather go alone."

Father and daughter watched him disappear around the bend in the road that led towards the Christopher house. Eve's eyes were snapping as she turned to her father. "Well, of all the impudence! The conceited — prig! That's what he is, father, a prig, a conceited prig!"

"Steady, daughter, steady. That's a harsh way to talk about your employer."

"He's not my employer," she flashed back. "I'll — I'll — strike. I'll work for you. Employer, indeed!" Her sniff fairly reeked with scorn. "And he called you a servant, father, you, a servant! You who have kept his old mills going for him while he was out in the backwoods somewhere growing up to be a conceited prig. Oh, I could kick him," and she stamped a slender foot hard as evidence of her physical prowess. "You a servant! Huh!"

"Hardly that, Eve. I'm a '*faithful* servant,' if you will recall, which is a very different thing. Anyone can be a servant, but the faithful kind are few and far between. It wasn't what he said to me I minded, it's the men."

"I know. He talked to them like a Sunday-school superintendent. 'Be good little boys and you shall each have a bag of candy!' Could you see their faces? It was like a cage of lions watching the antics of a Skye terrier and trying to

decide whether to eat him now or let him play around a little."

She stopped with a gasp. John Christopher stood in the gateway. His face was very pale, but he was calm.

"I suppose I am the Skye terrier, Miss Walcott? Pardon me," as she began a stammering apology. "It's no matter. Maybe I am. I had no intention of eavesdropping when I came back to ask your father to send a boy down to the station for my bags, but I couldn't help overhearing the last sentence. Will you see to the bags, Mr. Walcott? Don't bother about it," as the manager attempted to speak. "It isn't the welcome I expected, but it doesn't matter. I can fight my own battles."

He stood facing the conscience-stricken pair, his face working now in an effort to keep a calm front. Then he turned and plodded back up the road toward "home." Father and daughter watched him till he disappeared again around the turn.

Then the man turned to the girl.

"Eve, Eve, what have you done?"

His self-possessed daughter dropped upon the door sill in a limp, dejected heap and plunged her face in her hands. "I don't suppose I'll have a chance to strike now," she sobbed. "But I do hate him, I do. So there!"

CHAPTER IX

ORGANIZING FOR DEFEAT

IF Christopher felt Eve's thrust at him in her figure of the Skye terrier — as felt it he must have — he showed no trace of it when they met next morning in the mill office. His good morning was cool and unruffled and it was the girl who flushed and shrank within herself a little. Christopher passed on into the manager's office and looked about him. Early as he was, others had been before him. The desk that had been Walcott's was gone and a large new one stood in the center of the room. Its top was bare save for a large inkwell and the proper complement of pens. Yes, and there was a large handful of freshly cut roses in a vase in the middle of it. That, had Christopher but known it, was Eve's peace offering, cut that morning in her own garden, not, as she carefully assured her father and herself, as a sign of a weakening of her hatred but as penance for her bad manners of the night before.

Christopher dropped into the big chair at the desk and looked about him. Where should he begin? And on what? He was ignorant even

of his exact official position in the mill management. Walcott held a few shares of the stock and Phœnix and Graham each had enough to qualify them as directors; aside from that the ownership lay all in Christopher's hands, but of actual official status he apparently had none so far. As he sat in somewhat disturbed uncertainty Eve entered with a bundle of letters.

"My father thought you might care to look over some of the correspondence," she said with a slightly malicious glance at the young man's idle pose and immaculate desk top. "It's practically all about orders in hand and estimates on new business, but perhaps I — I," she hesitated, not in embarrassment but in uncertainty as to the exact phrase that should bear the proper shade of deference tinged with malice.

The young man supplied it for her, smoothly and without a sign of conscious resentment. "You can explain the things I don't understand, you were about to say. You'll probably be busy, for a few days at least. As a matter of fact, I have only the faintest idea of what we do or whom we do it for. As to how we do it, I am in Stygian darkness."

Eve felt her barriers falling a little before his frankness, but she only nodded her comprehension and smiled in more friendly fashion. "If you want me any time, this will call me." She touched a button at the side of John's desk and a buzzer sounded in the next room. And all through that

forenoon the buzzer made itself heard more than once.

As though the Fates had conspired to throw fresh snares around John's feet without delay, that afternoon saw the first serious accident that the Christopher Mills had known in months. John and Walcott were standing side by side not thirty feet from one of the larger rolls. Out from between the revolving cylinders shot the fiery serpent, sparks flying in hissing showers, white-hot, radiating heat in sickening waves. Of a sudden there was a shout of warning, a roar from the man who stood by the rolls as he leaped at the levers that controlled them. He was too late by the barest fraction of a second. A man lay gasping and groaning on the bare ground a moment and then the last breath heaved painfully and he lay still, a great, gaping burn across his bare chest and the sickening smell of burned human flesh in the air telling the story of the stumble or slip that had thrown him squarely across the white-hot steel. The rolls rumbled into silence, a silence that hung the more heavy and depressing because of the din that had preceded it and the tragedy that had silenced the din.

John walked beside the stretcher that bore the dead man home to the mill cottage and the slatternly wife and dirty children that awaited him. The news ran before them as leaves fly before an autumn gale and the wife met them midway of the dusty road. John had expected screams,

tears, hysterical appeals. There were none. It was a dry-eyed, close-lipped, white-faced woman who met the little procession with the stretcher at its head and walked beside her husband in his last home-coming. They bore him into the house, pathetic in its half-hearted attempts at decoration and homeliness, and laid him on the bed that crowded the few battered chairs in the living room. The bearers turned away, heads bared, tiptoeing awkwardly in silent file. Soon would come the older women from the other cottages to prepare the body for the grave. A mill town is only too familiar with such scenes.

John turned at the door and glanced at the woman standing dry-eyed at the bed's foot staring at the form on the bed now hidden under a patched sheet. "If you want anything — now or — or later," he began.

The woman's eyes met his. "Can you give me back my man?" she asked. There was no scorn in her voice — hardly bitterness even; only the dull apathy of those who face at last the inevitable and the long-expected.

It was a bad introduction for John into the everyday work of the mills. Even Walcott, veteran as he was, was shaken. Use had not dulled his sense of sympathy, casually as he might treat the dangers of the mills in speech with his young employer. The first impulse of the latter had been to turn his back on the scene of the tragedy and spend the rest of the day among the

hills in the hope that he might purge his mind of its vision of horror. But the mills drew him as a street accident draws the passer-by's eyes, try as he may to turn them away.

As he entered the mill yard he found the buildings humming with labor as before, pouring forth steam and smoke and flame and noise, as though there had been no pause in the steady beat of industry. The rolls had paid a brief tribute of silence to their victim and then the world's hunger for steel drove them to their task again. John entered his office and threw himself into his chair. He felt limp and ill, sick to his soul at the memory of what he had seen and more at the significance that second thought gave to the tragedy. This then was the real cost of steel — not money, not labor, not expenditure of thought, but human life. The furnaces of his mills were veritable Moloch altars, taking as they chose their toll of blood. The fact that none had been demanded for months and that none might be rendered again for other months was nothing. One life outweighed tons of steel. And what of those left behind — the slatternly women and their dirty children? What of the mills' responsibility to them?

He would go further with this now while the steel was still hot that had done the murder. The buzzer brought Eve to his desk. "Will you send someone to find Mr. Walcott and bring him here?" The young man's tone was curt and impersonal and Eve's anger stirred again at

the brusque order, but she only nodded in compliance.

"What do we do for the families of the men who are killed in the mills?" was his question of Walcott when the latter stood by his desk five minutes later.

"We keep them from starving as long as they stay here." Walcott's tone matched John's in crispness. "When the boys are old enough we take them into the mills."

"And kill them, too, I suppose in due course."

Walcott flushed at the bitter implication, but he held his temper in check. "We do the best we can," he said gravely. "The risks are there and the men know them. Our record is cleaner than that of any mill of our size and kind in Pennsylvania."

John moved impatiently. "'Cleaner' isn't enough. Can't we make it clean?"

Walcott's slow smile was a trifle grim. "I am open to suggestions," he said. "The Christopher Mills are not deliberate murderers."

The coupling of his own name with the mills checked the young owner's criticisms.

After all it was his business, peculiarly and entirely. If he wished changes made he had but to say the word. It was a case for thought, then. He must not act hastily or without a clear idea of the goal to be gained. The conference that he had desired with his manager came to a sudden end and Walcott went back to his own cares

and problems. John Christopher stared out of the window for a full half hour — the roar of the mills a half-heard undertone to his troubled thoughts. Then he jerked himself to his feet, snatched up his hat, and flung himself out of the office which had suddenly become sordid and distasteful to him.

Nor did he reappear at the mills again until three days had elapsed. It did not appear what he was doing during his absence, although Walcott learned from the foreman of the rolls that he had sent money to the newly made widow to pay for the funeral and had given instructions that all needful food and clothing were to be supplied to the family at his personal expense. The foreman grinned a little as he gave Walcott this news, knowing as he did that from the day of the first John Christopher the Christopher Mills had held it their duty to do all this and more whenever the need arose.

On the fourth day John appeared again and again summoned his manager for a conference.

"I've been thinking over a plan for pensions," he announced briefly. "We need them for just such cases as that the other day and we need them too for the old men who've worked themselves out."

To Walcott's question as to his plan his reply was a trifle vague, but he was clear at least that the company should set aside each year a fund sufficient to cover all possible demands. "Then

why not increase the wages by that amount and let the men look after their own pensions?"

There was a little pity in John's smile. "Will they save it or any part of it if we do?" he asked.

"Probably not," Walcott admitted. "But I'm equally sure that they'll be more improvident than ever if they know they'll be taken care of at the company's expense. Personally I don't mind saying that I've always been strong for insurance and pension schemes, but I'd rather see the men starting them themselves."

John looked up quickly at this, but Walcott went smoothly on. "I've been here a long time, Mr. Christopher, and I was a hand once myself. I know how suspicious they are of the helping hand. I'm not condemning your plan, but I'd like to know first how the men are going to take it."

"Let's ask them, then." John's retort was quick on the heels of Walcott's argument. "Pick two or three of the oldest and most popular and we'll find out what they think of it."

Walcott looked a little blank at this, but he was not to be outdone by this youngster. He stepped to the door.

"Send word to Murphy, Hawkins, and Palzer to come to my office when the noon whistle blows," he said to Eve. "They are the three oldest men in the mills," he said to John, "an Irishman, an Englishman and a German. Noth-

ing that happens in the mills, or the town either, for the matter of that, gets by them. And what they think to-day the rest of the men are apt to be thinking next week."

Hard upon the noon whistle came Murphy, Hawkins, and Palzer, grizzled, deep-chested, steady, unwinking eyes peering through half-shut lids as though into the glare of furnaces, caps held tight in gnarled hands.

"Ye sent for us, Mr. Walcott," said Murphy, the spokesman. All three ignored their young employer save for a quick glance as they entered.

"Yes, Mr. Christopher and I have been discussing pensions and we want to know what you three think of it. I told Mr. Christopher that you old rascals were the bellwethers of the flock."

Murphy grinned. He and Walcott were old friends and to him he would speak with the freedom of long acquaintance. Of the young master he knew nothing, nor to tell the truth, did he or the others care greatly what this last of the Christophers said or did so long as Steve Walcott held his place at the head of the mills.

"It's like this," put in young Christopher, "I want to be sure that none of my people want for any of the necessities of life. That accident the other day — the man's family — old men like yourselves — all these things are on my conscience. The mill should care for those who can no longer care for themselves."

"Is it charity you're thinkin' of, Mr. Christopher?" The reference to old men had angered Murphy a little and loosened his quick Irish tongue.

"Not at all. Not at all." John saw his mistake and hastened to repair it. "Not charity, but the mill's duty. You're entitled to it."

Murphy studied the young man through his half-closed eyes. How much dare he say?

"Can I speak ye plain, Mr. Christopher?"

John nodded.

"Then if we've earned it, give it to us now an' let us save it ourselves if we want to. Sure the Christopher Mills is a good boss an' it's buried its dead an' looked after its sick an' crippled all its days. What more do we want? If anything more's comin' to us, just put it on our wages. If there ain't, then we're square already."

John turned to the others. "Do you agree with that?" he asked.

They nodded and Hawkins's deep voice supplemented. "Murphy's got the right of it, we think, Mr. Christopher. Some of us save a bit here and there and Mr. Walcott sees to it that our savings are kept fair and square. For the rest of it, it's a bargain between the mills and the men. They pay our wages and we do the work. There's chances o' course, but we take 'em with our eyes open and ask no odds of the company or anyone else."

John was baffled and without words. After

all if the men didn't want it, what else was there to say? They filed out and Walcott went with them. He had made his point and had no desire to press his advantage. In sober truth, as he told Eve that night, he was more than a little sorry for the ambitious youngster who was so hopelessly butting his head against the stone wall of mill tradition and the workers' ingrained conservatism. Eve's answer was a specimen of typically feminine logical illogicality.

"Why can't we ask him to dinner to-morrow night?" she suggested with an air of friendly indifference.

Her father pretended to misunderstand. "Who? Murphy?" he said.

"Murphy, too, if you like," was Eve's cool response, "but I was thinking of Mr. Christopher."

Rather to her surprise the young man accepted the invitation with alacrity and appeared at the appointed hour of six — Doncaster was not fashionable in the matter of times for dining — with commendable promptness. At the outset it was not a wonderfully successful affair. John was as courteous as heart could wish and Eve did her duty as hostess without apparent reservation or distaste. Nevertheless the conversation lagged and neither seemed to find much within their minds worthy of offering to the other. Walcott was hungry and not a talkative man at best. He ate as a hungry man should, with entire absorption in the business in hand.

The first pangs satisfied, he had leisure for the others and noted for the first time their half-hearted essays at speech.

A smile hovered for a moment under his close-clipped gray mustache. He glanced at the wall behind John's chair and lifted his hand. "Did you notice those pictures, Mr. Christopher?" he said.

John turned his head and saw two portraits — one of an old man, gray-haired, smooth of face, with deep-set eyes spread wide apart by a high-bridged nose — a Roman in feature and in powerful pose. The other was younger, and the collar and tie belonged to a later generation, but features and bearing alike were of the same eagle brood, keen, powerful, daring, invincible. As John studied them conviction grew and he felt his eyes moisten. Dunham had shown him a faded photograph of the younger man the night he had revealed the secret of the lost years.

"That is my father," he said slowly, his finger pointed at the younger man; "I've seen a photograph of him. The other —"

"Your grandfather," Walcott finished for him. "He founded the mills and ran them for nearly forty years. He was of the old breed of iron-masters — the men who began with a single furnace and knew every inch of the process from ore to finished product."

John winced a little at the implied comparison, and Eve saw the movement and glanced reproach-

fully at her father, but the latter was unconscious of anything invidious and rambled on:

"That picture was painted by some big French artist and your grandfather gave orders that it was to hang in the mill office as long as there was a Christopher at the head of the Christopher Mills. Then your father's was painted, and hung beside the other. When he died and you were taken away I thought it best to bring them up here against the day of your return. There was always the danger of some accident in the mills and I didn't want to be responsible for them down there."

The talk rambled on a little more freely now, although Eve, usually ready of speech on all occasions, contributed hardly her fair share. Walcott told stories of the old days, stories handed down from the time of the first Christopher, whom he never knew, stories of the second John, father of the young man at the table. There was the time, for example, when he broke a strike by beating the leader, man to man, in the good English fashion, with bare knuckles against bare flesh; then Walcott must pay due tribute of praise to the man who had plunged into the river fully dressed as he stood and dragged out two boys, sons of one of the hands, who had ventured beyond their depth.

"When I told him he was foolish to risk his life for a couple of little ragamuffins, he told me to mind my own business. His life was his to risk

as he chose. Besides, one life was as good as another, when it came to the last pinch. It was poor philosophy, I reckon," Walcott continued, "but that was the kind of a man he was."

John's face glowed, but he had no words of appreciation of Walcott's praise of his father. For the time he was caught out of himself and his preoccupation. With his momentary self-forgetfulness went also a feeling of confidence, of being at last part and parcel of the place where he had been born and where the life of his father and his grandfather before him had passed.

His glance wandered over the table and lingered on the great bowl of roses in the center — crimson with wide, flaring petals. They were different from any he had ever seen before — save once — and he strove to remember that other occasion.

"What wonderful roses," he said. "I've never seen them anywhere else except here in Doncaster."

"And the only place that you'll see them in Doncaster is in my daughter's garden," said Walcott proudly before Eve could turn the conversation. Remembrance of the other place where he had seen them — on his desk in the office — came to John on the instant and his face glowed a little. Eve, seeing it, froze into an icy indifference that covered any number of very pointed things that she would have liked to say to her father. But the latter, happily unconscious of the fate he was

courting, was sailing serenely on on his favorite topic — his daughter's skill as a gardener.

Eve raged inwardly and thanked fortune when their guest rose to go. And then, just at the parting words, her pride in her father surged back over her when he put his hand on the young man's arm and said, pointing at the door to the dining-room, "Those portraits go back to the office tomorrow, Mr. Christopher."

The boy's thanks were brief, but his voice shook and he turned at the last to say, "A little more, Mr. Walcott, and you'll convince me that I am really a Christopher."

Father and daughter watched him down the road till the luminous darkness swallowed his figure. Eve's good-night remark was characteristic:

"I don't like him, father, but I'm awfully sorry for him. Just think, his father is only a picture to him — not even a memory. Only paint and canvas and a gilded frame."

But the man answered: "A little more than that, daughter, a little more than that, if I know the Christopher blood."

CHAPTER X

A BUBBLE PRICKED

IN after years John Christopher had little pleasure in recalling his first six months at Doncaster. His first verdict, still only slightly altered, was that they were months of utter, abject failure. Perhaps in time he will modify this decision. Success and failure are often matters of perspective merely, fragments of a picture that alter in value as more and more of the canvas comes to view. He tried to be busy, but many days began for him without consciousness of any specific duty that lay before him and ended without a sense of anything accomplished. Many things were attempted within and without the mill, but they seemed to lead nowhither and to suggest nothing else. Within the mills all threads led straight into Walcott's capable hands. The manager did his best to lead the young owner into a knowledge of the secrets of the business, but a bad beginning had given both of them a slight distaste for the necessary conferences and John's boyish haste to master it all at a leap did not make for good results. Outside the mill his relations with the men had been well summed up by Messrs.

Murphy and Hawkins. They were satisfied with their jobs — at least as well satisfied as it is possible for frail human flesh to be — and they asked no odds or aid of their young employer.

So the six months passed, fruitless, irritating, discouraging they seemed to him. At times he suspected Walcott of feeling the strain. Only Eve seemed unchanged. Cool, friendly, but distant as ever, she went about her work, neither her threat of a strike nor her fear of being deprived of the chance to strike — voiced on the day of young Christopher's appearance at the mills — having been realized.

Instead, her brown head was bent over the typewriter and the keys clicked a cheerful obligato to the deep music of the mills. The August sun was blazing when young John Christopher had his first sight of his ancestral domain and now the feeble light of a February afternoon sifted in through the dingy panes of the office window. The yard was ankle deep in slush and snow lay thick on the hillsides. It had been a hard winter for the young master of the Christopher Mills.

Eve raised her head as the door opened and the young gentleman himself stepped heavily into the room and flung himself down in a chair.

"Oh, don't mind me," he said. "Go right on with your work. That's what everyone does when I come around. I swear I wish I had never seen these confounded mills."

The girl whirled around in amazement at the

boyish pettishness of the tone. "Why, Mr. Christopher!"

"Don't say, 'Why, Mr. Christopher,' say, 'Be a good little boy and you shall have a bag of candy.'"

The color rose in Eve's cheeks at the memory the incident evoked. "I suppose that was very ungentlemanly, wasn't it? I'm sorry. I apologize."

"Don't, Mr. Christopher. I deserve it." Her head was very high now and it was her most dignified tone. "I've been sorry ever since. It was rude and I ought to have known better — but —"

"But I deserved it, didn't I? And I deserve it still, don't I? The lions haven't eaten the Skye terrier yet, but they've done worse. They've lost interest in him. They don't even yawn when they see him playing around. They just look the other way and go on with their work — as you were doing just now. Why don't you do it again? Don't mind me. I'm only the unlucky beggar who owns the mills — and wishes he didn't."

Eve stared in open-mouthed and very unladylike amazement. The young man swung impatiently to and fro in the swivel chair, kicking idly at the desk as he swung. The girl was puzzled and disturbed, but her bewilderment was tempered with amusement at the picture he presented. After all he was only a boy and his

feelings had been hurt. If his favorite saddle-horse had been lamed or his overtures rejected by the girl of his boyish fancy, he would not have looked greatly different, she reflected. His air of melancholy was so very youthful that it seemed as though the promise of a better horse, or a smile from a more appreciative fair one would surely have dispelled it. Even a pat on the head and a word of encouragement would not have seemed amiss. Then she remembered that she hated him and turned back to her work.

"Miss Walcott." The clatter of the keys ceased. "Did you ever feel like telling your troubles to anyone — even a good-natured cigar-store Indian?"

"Why, I don't know," she stammered. "I never knew —"

"Never knew a cigar-store Indian? You know me, don't you? Come to think of it, that isn't a bad comparison. I've been standing in the middle of Doncaster for the last six months, for all the world as though I had a cigar store behind me. Only instead of holding a bunch of wooden cigars in my hand, I've had free baths and a circulating library and men's clubs and other interesting things that mill hands go crazy over in books — and won't look at in Doncaster."

The girl smiled in spite of herself. "I don't think you're quite fair to yourself, Mr. Christopher."

"I don't know. I'm beginning to think that

the comparison is roughest on the Indian. He sells a few cigars now and again, while I —" He flung out his hands in a gesture of utter discouragement. "It's no use. I've got to tell someone and you might as well suffer. I can't tell your father. I think he has a sneaking liking for me — for my father's sake, if for no other reason. It would worry him, and the Lord knows I've worried him enough already."

"And you don't mind worrying me? Is that it?"

"No. It won't worry you. I have your word for it that you hate me."

She raised her hand in contradiction but he hurried on.

"I've bored my friends to death asking for advice and encouragement, and now I'm going to try an enemy for a change. I've read somewhere that it's a poor man who hasn't a few enemies. If that's true, I'm the best man in Doncaster to-day. Except your father and possibly yourself, I think every person on my pay-roll would be glad to see my back."

Eve smiled demurely. "You forget that I am your enemy."

"No, I don't, but I believe on my soul that you'd be sorry to see me go. Whatever else I've done, I've furnished you enough amusement to last you the rest of your natural life."

The girl's face was smileless now. "That's not true, Mr. Christopher. I have not laughed

at you at least, whatever other crimes I may have committed."

"I'll take that back. You haven't. It might have been better if you had. I feel like a Prohibitionist candidate for Congress in a brewery town. People don't even take the trouble to laugh at me. They just walk around me and go on about their business. What's the trouble, anyway? The Lord knows I've done the best I knew how."

"Is that always enough?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, don't you think that sometimes when we do the best we know how and fail, the fault is not with the doing but with the knowing?"

"Do you mean that I don't understand the men?"

"Perhaps."

"Well, what do they want? Surely it doesn't take great wisdom to know that when men are dirty they need a bath, yet my proposal to build free baths was met with as blank indifference as though I had suggested an ice-cream sociable to a gang of Esquimaux. There weren't half a dozen books in the whole town, but my free library is shunned as though there was a smallpox sign on the front door. I tried to get up a men's club to meet for smokers and other high-class entertainments once a week, but there were three small boys and a deaf mute at the first meeting, while Slazenger's bar down in the village was

packed to the doors. I tried to interest the young men and boys in football last year, but they wouldn't even kick when I wanted them to.

"It's the same way with everything I've tried. I swear, I believe if I offered them free salvation, they'd tell me to go to the other place and rush straight off there themselves. I couldn't give away loaves of bread if the whole town was starving to death. What's the matter with them, anyway?"

"Perhaps there's nothing the matter with *them.*" The emphasis could not be evaded.

"Then what or who is it?"

The girl fingered the keys of her typewriter thoughtfully. "Can I speak frankly?"

John rose and bowed in mocking condescension. "You have the king's permission. I've guessed till I'm tired. Now I'd like to hear someone else's answer to the riddle. Your guess is as good as anyone's, maybe better."

"You place me in a very embarrassing position, Mr. Christopher," she said slowly.

"I don't doubt it," he interrupted gloomily. "That's where I seem to place everyone, including myself. Go ahead, never mind my feelings. They're in a pulpy condition anyway."

"You're my employer, you know —"

"For Heaven's sake don't remind me of that. I'm everybody's employer and nobody's friend. Forget the cash nexus part of it. Tell the truth and shame the — employer, if you can."

His face belied the mocking words. The girl could not forget that her name was on his payrolls, but of a sudden that seemed to her a very small and unimportant fact. Money is an ill balm for an aching heart, and all the Christopher millions could not ease the smart that the boy's pride,— or perhaps his vanity,— had received. He asked for advice, but what he really wanted was sympathy. The latter she felt dumbly, but could not find words to voice or courage to offer, but advice he should have.

"Then let me speak plainly," she began; "don't interrupt and please don't think that I am trying to hurt you."

"Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Oh, I forgot. You're my enemy."

"You promised not to interrupt."

"Did I? All right. The defendant is ready. He pleads guilty and the jury will please enter a recommendation of mercy."

She laughed despite the seriousness of the purpose she had formed.

"How can I tell you the truth, if you won't give me a chance to tell you anything? You must be serious. This is no joking matter."

"I know it isn't. I've been six months gathering that impression and it's fairly well printed on my brain. But this is the first chance I've had to take the strait-jacket off my mind. I won't interrupt again. Go on, please?"

"Well, in the first place," she ticked off the

points on her fingers, "the men don't know you. Six months is a short time to get acquainted with fifteen hundred workmen. They are little more than children mentally, without a child's desire to please or be pleased. Many of them have worked here for years and have come to feel themselves a part of the mill. Of course, they had heard the story of the lost heir of the Christophers, but none really believed that you would ever come back. I didn't myself, and I thought I knew everything my father did."

"A little jealousy there, young lady," thought John, but he only nodded in understanding.

"My father was the head of the mill to them. He had been and he would be, and I think they were content. I don't want to sing my father's praises to you, Mr. Christopher, but he has been a good manager — a 'faithful servant.'" She glanced at him keenly, but evidently he failed to recognize his own offending phrase.

"Then came the news suddenly that you had been found and were coming back to take your father's place. You came and went through the mills and then you — you —"

"Made a fool speech to the men. Strangely enough, I remember the occasion perfectly. This isn't an interruption," in a tone of apology, "it's an interpretation. Go on!"

"Well, you *did* make a — rather — fool-*ish* speech. You admitted it first, you know. The men didn't understand that and they suspected

you. It's foolish, I know, and childish, but I told you their minds were the minds of children. Some of them had had experience with generous employers at other places who gave grudgingly with the left hand and took back greedily with the right and talked in a loud voice all the time, so the men wouldn't see how the trick was being done."

"I know. It's the good old sleight-of-hand game. I've paid good money to see it done before now."

"So you see, though they've never been to college, they knew all about Greeks bearing gifts. You were all Greek to them.

"That's all now for point number one. Now for number two," and she turned down a second finger. "You didn't understand the men. That's a kind of corollary to number one. If you had known them you'd have known how they'd suspect you and avoid you and feel uneasy when you were around. You haven't learned yet that the only way to get them interested in any idea outside the day's work is to let them think it's their own idea. I'm talking like a school-teacher or a female lecturer, but you must remember that I've talked these things over with my father ever since I was a little thing. He knows the men from top to bottom, and he says the employer who is caught doing anything but running his works deserves to be ostracized by all the employees. His right hand is his men at work, you see, and

his left hand is all his plans for them outside, and he mustn't let his right hand know what his left is doing. I'm afraid you let your two hands see too much of each other."

"Yes, and of my feet, too. I seem to have done most of my work with the latter. Proceed."

"There isn't much more to say. Point number three," and the third finger came down, "is your lack of knowledge of the business. That wouldn't have been so bad, though, if the men hadn't begun with suspicion in their minds that everything you said and did only seemed to confirm. But they heard that you had lived on a farm and you know the crude, ignorant contempt of the laborer for the farmer.

"That's all I have to say, and I think it's enough. If my father knew I'd talked to you this way, Mr. Christopher, he'd — he'd take my head off."

"Then I shall certainly not tell him. There are few enough heads around this shop as it is."

"Have I offended you?" Her voice was almost timid he thought as he recalled the calm, self-confident tone that had marked her few words to him in the past six months.

"No, not offended. I shan't pretend that it doesn't hurt. No one — not even an opinionated young jackass — can see all his hopes and plans fall to pieces around him and be told that it's his own fault — especially if he knows it's true — without having his vanity flicked just a lit-

tle. I've been thinking some of the things you've told me, but I wanted to be sure I wasn't mistaken about that as about other matters. But it's all true. I had the chance of a lifetime, but I threw it away. If I had only had sense enough to wait and learn from your father — and you — but no, that wouldn't do. Like a young fool, I thought the other fools who lecture in colleges and write books knew it all. And this is the result."

The girl was touched by his distress. And it was all so pitiably true. If he had deliberately striven to find the wrong way to the hearts of his men, he could not have chosen better. She ventured on some words of commonplace consolation.

"It was not all your fault. You meant —"

He whirled upon her. "Don't say I meant well. Don't say it! I'll not be responsible if you do. The place that's paved with good intentions is inhabited principally by people who meant well, and they spend their time patching the holes in the pavement. Whether I meant well or ill, it's done — beyond repairing."

"You're really not fair to yourself, Mr. Christopher," she protested. "You are young. In time the men will come to trust you."

"In time? I don't believe it. There isn't time enough in the world to win back the ground I've lost. I've tried to reason that conviction down and I've tried to joke about it this afternoon, but it's no use. I'm beaten, Miss Walcott, I'm beaten."

He dropped his head in his hands with a groan. The girl sat silent, awed at his misery, tears very near the surface. The dim office was a Gethsemane. The boy's youth only added to the poignant tragedy of his failure. He had not even the memory of past achievement to compensate him for the disaster of this, his one attempt.

The little clock on the wall measured off the seconds monotonously. The roar of the mills filtered in to them. Whatever else happened, however the scepter rose powerfully or fell limply from the hands of him to whom it had been given, the mills would go on, ponderously, remorselessly, knowing neither friend nor foe.

From the wall by the door the framed pictures of the two dead Christophers that Walcott, true to his promise, had sent down from his house, looked down at the quiet figure in the chair. Slowly he raised his head and his gaze fastened itself on the younger of the two faces. He stood erect and approached it a step or two. The girl gasped and her hands clenched hard at the edges of her little typewriter stand. The boy's face was white and drawn, stricken with bitter agony.

He flung out his hands toward his father's picture. "I've failed, father, I've failed. Can you hear me? Do you know what I've done? I've betrayed the trust. I've thrown my birthright away. I'm a stranger in the mills you gave me to rule over. Why did you do it? Why did you send me away? 'May the end prove the

wisdom of the beginning,' you said, and this is the end."

He turned to the girl. She was crying now in earnest. He looked at her calmly. "Don't waste your tears on me, Miss Walcott. Save them for real tragedies. Don't shed them over the comedy of a young fool who tried to ride before he knew how to mount a horse."

He turned back to the desk and vaguely fingered the papers heaped there. "What's to be done? What's to be done?" He said the words over and over, dully and helplessly. "Miss Walcott, can't you suggest something? You've diagnosed my disease; can't you give me a remedy?"

She shook her head dumbly, dabbing at her tear-reddened eyes with a very moist handkerchief. His mouth twisted in a wry smile. "As bad as that, eh? Incurable! I believe it is."

His tone changed. Angry impatience followed his melancholy of depression. "Why should I stay here? What good am I? In all this town there is no creature so useless, such a cumberer of the earth as I. The very dogs in the street bark at me in scorn of my uselessness. I only hinder your father in his work and breed discontent among the men. Do you know — can you tell me one good reason why I should stay? Can you point out one person who wants me here, one single, solitary human being who will not breathe freer at sight of my back?

"No, there isn't one. You needn't answer. I know the truth about myself at last."

"Indeed, indeed, Mr. Christopher, you are too hard, too unjust," the girl protested. "I can't tell you what to do because I don't know myself. I thought it would be easy to give advice and hard to sympathize. It's the sympathy that's easy and the advice won't come at all. Why did I speak to you as I did? It was impertinent, just cheeky. Nothing else. You ought to hate me for it."

"No. No. I don't hate you." His look brought the blood to her face. "In fact, I believe I'm grateful to you. I half believe you'll be sorry to see me go. Sorry *for* me, at least. And that will help a little."

"To see you go? Then you really mean to —"

"To go? Yes, I think so. There's nothing else to do. When the doctors have tried everything else, they usually recommend a change of air. I don't know where I'll go or when, but it will be soon."

"And you will stay — how long?"

"God knows, who knows everything. Till I've forgotten a little. I want to go where things will happen to blur the memory of these last six months. The mills will go on just the same under your father as they have for twenty years, and the men will settle down in the old way. You will be happier when you've no longer any need

to worry and wonder about where I'm going to break out next. It would be small loss if I stayed away forever. Please don't think I'm trying to be tragic. I want to let myself down easy, but every way I try there's a pretty hard bump at the end of the drop.

"Good-by, my enemy." He held out his hand and smiled.

"You are going at once?"

"As soon as I can, I think. I shall try to see your father to-night. I'd like to disappear as quietly as possible. Thank Heaven, I had the good sense to come quietly. That was dad's doing. I've never told you about dad, have I?"

"No. He was your —"

"My second father? Yes. I think he half feared something of what has happened, but I don't believe even he guessed what a miserable little Waterloo it would be. I wonder if I'll ever have the nerve to tell him all about it.

"But I must go or I'll have you crying again, and then I'd probably cry too. I feel like it." He laughed roughly in defiance of possible tears. "If you can ever find it in your mercy to write me, do it and tell me all about yourself and your father. You should forgive your enemies, especially when they're down."

He turned toward the side of the room where the roar of the mills sounded through the thin wall and waved his hand in mock tragedy that was only half mockery.

"'Farewell, a long farewell, to all my greatness,'" he quoted. Then he swung on his heel and left the room without another glance at the white-faced girl.

The next day he left Doncaster and the other name on his ticket was New York.

CHAPTER XI

SEEING LIFE

A WEEK that is past is a lifetime when a man has youth and a good digestion. It is only the wounds of the old that are slow to heal; it is not until the shadow begins to fall behind the traveler that the Past overtakes him and walks by his side, a cheerful companion or a grievous bore or a sinister reminder of buried talents and wasted opportunities as Fate or his own blind willfulness may have elected.

When the Pullman porter brushed the dust of Doncaster from John Christopher's shoes that young gentleman was sure of nothing but that his principal baggage was a broken heart and a complete outfit of ruined hopes. The second day, after his arrival in New York he noted with interest that the sun rose as usual and that he was able to face a dinner table with only slightly diminished zest. On the third day he considered without embarrassment the possibilities of getting through the day without more than a fair number of regretful thoughts of his six months at Doncaster, and on the fourth the conclusion was forced upon him that life at twenty-three has many attractive vistas for a not unprepossessing young

man with a fortune in his hands and the shreds of a romantic mystery still hanging about him. That was the day he bought an automobile and received a letter from the Woman. The auto can be dismissed with a word; it was the first of a long series, each of which developed the customary tendencies of its kind to puncture tires, shed strange parts of its mechanism along the road, and undermine the foundations of its chauffeur's character.

The Woman's letter was a matter of more importance.

"My dear Boy," it ran. "You do not remember me probably, but I have seen you many times in the past — first when you were a baby and sat on my lap and crowed over my watch. Then your father died and you disappeared. The next time I saw you, you were a boy of twelve on an Illinois farm and you were engaged in some sort of a strange struggle with a weed by the side of the road. You did not remember me and I was not sure that you were you. Do you recall that day?

"Then I lost you again till the newspapers told the world six months ago that the heir to the Christopher fortune had been found. This morning those same newspapers told me that you were in New York.

"Now, I want you to come and see me. I am an old woman, but I know a few people whom I am sure you would like to know and who will be

glad to know you. I can't give you the keys to the city, but I can unlock a few doors that are fastened even against golden keys, and I want to see you. Your mother was as a daughter to me and her son must not ignore me."

The name to the letter was "Isabel Burroughs."

John read the letter through and sat staring at it. Many things that had happened in the last six months were beginning to blur already in the glare of the brighter lights of the city, but the woman by the roadside was as distinct in his memory as a well-cut cameo to the eye. The scene showed small in the perspective of the years, but every detail — the weedy, sun-smitten pasture, the straggling rail fence, even the warm smell of the dusty ragweeds along the road — was clear in his memory.

"So she did know me, after all, just as dad was afraid she did. And I knew her, only I didn't know I did. I wonder why she didn't come back? What would have happened if she had? Would dad have kept me?"

He thought of "dad's" quiet, strong will and the straight lines of his mouth and chin. "I reckon he'd have kept me all right. He'd promised, and he'd have stood by his promise against all the women in the world."

He walked to the window. His hotel looked down on Fifth Avenue from the top of Murray Hill and in either direction the street was crowded with cabs and automobiles, hurrying or

crawling as the tide flowed over the crossings or checked at the traffic guardian's uplifted hand to let the cross-currents of pedestrians by. The air was crisp and the sky as blue as the sea. The New York of the well-to-do is at its best on such a winter day, when the air is like wine and the sky a benediction.

John had little knowledge of cities and the ways of men and women there, but he felt the thrill of it stir in his blood. This was the focus-point of the New World. Through New York's giant lens pass the golden rays of America's prosperity to dazzle and perhaps scorch the other world across the Atlantic. Every train bears its freight of insensate wealth and pulsing humanity. The millionaire cattlemen of Western ranges, rough miners fresh from unparalleled strikes, immaculately clothed but with the stain of their calling ineffaceably set on their manners, barons of the Chicago killing-pens, other barons of the oil-fields or the mills and mines of Pennsylvania, all find their way here sooner or later to spend their money and cleanse themselves and their wives and daughters of the reek of its making. But to most of these the metropolis remains a mystery; they view it in hotel dining rooms, at the theater or in the parade of the streets, but they are forever locked out of the chamber of the sacred mysteries of the city as securely as though they stood at the door in the overalls and hip boots of their early days. Their children may advance one room

nearer and to their children's children it may be permitted to stand with the elect before the high altar. The gold of the newly rich must rest for at least two generations before the taint of its smelting has completely evaporated.

And these baubles that the women of the aliens longed for with all their hearts and were fated to die without were his by right of birth. His father and mother had conferred them upon him before he was born. As dad had kept the secret of his name and fortune till the appointed time, as Walcott and Graham and Phœnix had guarded his fortune, so this old woman had kept intact this right of blood, this seignorial privilege of the metropolis. He was not a snob, but he was young and rich and he had left his cares in Doncaster. As well expect a prince to turn his back upon the purple as to ask the heir of the Christophers to scorn the gift his fairy godmother had cherished for him.

It was in the morning that Mrs. Burroughs's letter came to him. By three o'clock he had breakfasted, bought his first automobile, lunched, dressed himself carefully, and stood outside the Madison Avenue house whose number was engraved at the head of the letter he had received. A sad-faced English butler admitted him, took his hat with the air of one taking upon himself the sorrows of the world, ushered him into a dimly lighted drawing room, and assured him with the cheerful tone of an undertaker that

Mrs. Burroughs would be down in a very few minutes.

She came slowly into the room and stood regarding him. He had not expected this critical survey from the tone of her letter and it embarrassed him.

"So you are John Christopher?" She took both his hands warmly enough now and held them. "I'd have known you anywhere. You have a look of your father. Let me see your eyes."

She turned him toward the light. "But your eyes are your mother's. She had the most beautiful eyes I ever saw in a human head. Gracious, lad, you mustn't blush that way at an old woman's compliment. You're not responsible for your eyes. For all you had to do with it, they might have been green and crossed into the bargain. Turn around and let me look at you."

He revolved obediently like a well-drilled cloak model, wondering the while at his strange welcome.

"That will do. Don't stand there spinning around like a human top. Sit down and tell me about yourself. What are you going to do with yourself and all your money?"

"I don't know. I've just come to town and I haven't had time to think yet," he managed to stammer.

"Think? My dear boy, you don't need to think. A man with as much money as you have

can hire people to think for him. All you need to do is to spend your income, and watch out that some girl doesn't marry you and take that task, too, out of your hands."

John was dazed by the swiftness and strangeness of her question and comment. He had come to call on a feeble old lady who had known and loved his mother and who, he half expected, would pat him on the shoulder and speak to him mildly of winter flannels and the welfare of his soul, as had been the practice of old ladies he had known in the past. Instead, he was being inspected, catechized, and advised, all in a breath, by a keen, cynical, sophisticated woman of the world who held herself as erect as a girl of twenty and in whose clear voice there was no echo of age.

"What a fool your father was to bury you out there in the wilderness for twenty years. Now don't take offense," as John moved uneasily in his chair. "I knew your father when he wore knickerbockers, and he was one of the best men in the world, but sometimes that kind are the biggest fools. I told Harvey so the other day. He's a long way from being either one, if he is my own son. But why don't you talk? I suppose I haven't given you much chance, have I? What about the mills? How long were you there?"

"Six months."

"Well?"

He wriggled on his chair and studied the pattern of the rug. How much should he tell? He had counted the beads on his string of troubles glibly enough only a few days before, but he shrank from exhibiting them to this keen-witted old woman with the sharp tongue. He began haltingly. "There isn't much to tell. I spent six months in Doncaster, hunting for a place to take hold, and — then — I came away."

"Then you came away," she mimicked. "If Ulysses had been as brief of speech as you are, young man, he would have earned the undying gratitude of a great many thousand school-boys. Your Odyssey lacks a little in detail. You didn't find a bed of roses waiting for you in Doncaster, I'll wager. Did you?"

"Not exactly. At least the roses had been carefully removed."

"And you've been sleeping on the thorns? Didn't I say your father was a fool? You can't train a race horse in a cornfield. If I had had as much sense as I had suspicion when I saw you by the road that day, I'd have kidnaped you and brought you up in the way you should go. But never mind, I have you now, and I shan't let you go in a hurry, I can promise you.

"How would you like me to bring you out, John? Don't blush like that, boy, and don't wriggle in your chair like a school-boy. Blushing has gone out of fashion in New York. There is so much cause for it that it's useless to try to keep

up with the demand. Do you want to be personally conducted into New York society?"

"I — I think so."

"You think so," she mimicked again. "Is that the best you can do? Well, I *know*. You will be the sensation of the year before you're six months older. You are young, you have money, you are not bad-looking, and *I* shall introduce you. Your blushes and your awkwardness — you *will* be awkward for a while, you know — will only add to the charm of your mystery. I don't know that your father was such a fool after all," she added reflectively.

John hadn't a very clear idea of what New York society was. He had read the New York papers, but his opinions, so far as he had any, had been formed more from the metropolitan gleanings that appeared daily in the newspapers of Chicago and the smaller cities of the Middle West. These had tended to give the impression that the principal diversions of New York high life were tampering with the marriage tie and proving the essential truth of the theory of evolution by eccentric dinners. Yet he had enough sense to believe that there was a saving remnant of old tradition and consciousness of responsible worth and dignity to keep a few here and there from conspicuous vulgarity at least. An aristocracy within a democracy is a contradiction of terms and an essential absurdity, but the world is built upon absurdities, and John Christopher thought he

could overlook both contradiction and absurdity if so he could find a place for himself. This thought was in his mind as he spoke.

"I don't believe I know just what you mean by society," he said, "but I want to belong to New York. I want to get into a place where I fit and where I can have a good time."

"You won't belong to New York; New York will belong to you, if you will trust yourself to me," Mrs. Burroughs rejoined. "In the first place, rid yourself of any idea that your money will be an irresistible lever. Millionaires are as common here as barons in a German watering-place! I've had a Graf for a chauffeur and a count of the Holy Roman Empire has dressed my hair at Baden-Baden. Even the tax-collector doesn't know all the millionaires in New York."

"I wasn't counting very much on my money, Mrs. Burroughs," the boy protested. "Six months in Doncaster have taught me that there are a few things you can't buy."

"Quite right, although I fancy you'll find your money rather more powerful in New York than in Doncaster. At least the things you can't buy won't stare you in the face on every corner quite so conspicuously. Pardon my referring to it, but I imagine you found the role of young lord of the manor rather a hard one to play in Doncaster, didn't you?"

John thought of that first evening in the mill yard and the crowd of silent, sullen, hostile faces

staring up at him, and he reddened at the recollection.

The woman laughed. "Never mind. We'll soon forget that. It's impossible to get along without money in New York, but it's bad form to mention it or to let it speak too loudly for you. The only thing more necessary than knowing what to do is to know how to do it. The people who give monkey dinners are quite within their rights, if that is the sort of company they like. Their only mistake is in sending to the Zoo for their guests of honor. It isn't necessary."

John was a little breathless and confused by the volleying of quick question, cynical criticism, and bitter comment with which he had been assailed, and the sound of footsteps in the hall, the swish of a woman's skirts, and a girl's high voice made a welcome break.

"Are you in there, grandma? May we come in? I've brought Carty home for tea."

A young woman cannonaded through the doorway and was half-way across the room before she saw Christopher. She stopped with a quick, self-possessed apology on her lips. The elder woman lifted her hands in deprecation. "Alice, Alice! Is this football or a bargain counter?"

"Neither one, grandma. Only your granddaughter's usual sedate and composed entrance. Am I to be introduced or spanked and sent upstairs?"

"You are to be introduced if you will give me

time, but the other is what you deserve. Come here, my dear." She held out her hand to the girl. "This is Mr. John Christopher, the son of the woman who was almost my daughter years ago. My tomboy granddaughter, Miss Alice Norton, Mr. Christopher."

Christopher took the hand which the girl impulsively stretched out to him. The grandmother had confused him, but the granddaughter had reduced him to the state of mind of a whirling dervish. She had flashed into the room with the quick lightness of a ballet dancer, and in the smile she gave him with her outstretched hand was the gay insouciance of childhood.

"I've been dying to meet you," she was saying. "Grandma said you were coming. You're the man without a past, aren't you?"

"And without a future too," Christopher responded. She dazzled him, but he felt more at his ease bandying words with her than sitting under the fire of the older woman's cynicism.

"We'll take care of the future, won't we, *grandmère?* Oh, I nearly forgot. Carty, come here." She turned to the young man who had followed her into the room and beckoned him forward as one beckons to a favorite child. "Mr. John Christopher, Mr. Carter Priestley. Mr. Priestley's chief claim to fame, Mr. Christopher, is the fact that he was born on Manhattan Island and has never been farther west than Jersey City.

He is the original typical New Yorker, aren't you, Carty?"

The young man's pale, cool face was unmoved by the girl's banter. His murmured "Delighted, I'm sure," as he touched John's hand in acknowledgment of the introduction, was toneless and blasé. John felt himself withdrawing into his shell of timidity and awkwardness again. He suddenly discovered that he had a pair of abnormally large hands dangling at the ends of preternaturally long arms and he caught himself looking at his feet and wondering what he should do with them in case he found it necessary to change his position.

"Lovely day, isn't it?" Mr. Priestley remarked with the air of one freeing himself of a great burden.

"I told you that before we came in," the girl declared. "Why can't you think of something of your own to say? Ask Mr. Christopher how he likes New York, or whether he prefers the opera to the theater, or if he's an automobile fiend. Are you, Mr. Christopher?"

"She means, do you run an automobile, Mr. Christopher," Mr. Priestley explained patiently. "Miss Norton takes me around with her to tell her victims which one of her questions she really expects to have answered. Otherwise she would be a modern edition of the Sphinx, not because she asks only one hard riddle, but because she asks

so many easy ones that she never has time to hear the answer to any of them."

Still acutely conscious of his hands and feet Christopher managed to stammer that an automobile had been added to his possessions that very day.

"Good!" said the girl. "I'll go out with you the first time. It's much more fun motoring with a novice. You never know whether the car is going to butt into a street car or climb a tree in Central Park or balk and sit down in the middle of Broadway. Carty was good fun at first, but he can't do anything now but break the speed law and you can do that with a dray if you'll put on a leather coat and automobile goggles. Promise to take me out the very first time and I'll love you forever."

"Alice," protested her grandmother, "you'll have Mr. Christopher thinking you're proposing to him the first thing you know."

"I may do that, too. I proposed to Carty in his new car, didn't I, Carty? But he was so busy trying to make up his mind whether to run over a baby carriage or the Sherman statue that he didn't have time to answer. Then he compromised by running into a fire-hydrant, and the policeman told him that if he'd had more to do with water before he started he wouldn't have had so much trouble with it at the end. By that time Carty was so angry that he couldn't have told whether I'd proposed to him or asked him to play marbles

with me in the Plaza. The way he bundled me into a cab was more profane than a drunken drayman's comments on the traffic regulations at Twenty-third Street. So you see what you have to expect when you take me out, Mr. Christopher."

"Good afternoon, folks," a deep voice sounded from the doorway.

The girl whirled. "Why, dad, I didn't hear you come in. Come to welcome the prodigal?" She flung one arm around his neck to receive his kiss and standing so she turned to Christopher. "Mr. Christopher, this is—"

"I have met the young gentleman already, Alice. Howd'y'do, Mr. Christopher."

He advanced to Christopher, hand outstretched, a grim smile on his face. The boy stood still in astonishment. The afternoon had been prolific in shocks, but this was the crowning blow of all. He had thought that he might catch a passing glimpse here and there in the metropolis of H. Anisty Norton, but that he should meet him here, evidently very much at home in the house of the woman who had taken upon herself the task of placing the last of the Christophers in his rightful place in the life of the city, was too much for human guessing.

The eyes of the great man were upon him in the same steady stare that he had felt in the office of the good gray president over a year before, only now amusement and not bewilderment was dominant in the look. "So I was right. You

didn't come into my office, did you? Well, we've had an end of the mystery and now you can get down to business."

"Business, father!" the girl broke in. "You'll do nothing of the kind. Mr. Christopher has come to New York to play."

Again the grim smile parted the great man's lips. "There are many different kinds of business, my dear. Play is one kind. We'll let Mr. Priestley look after that." He favored Priestley with a nod at which a little color showed in that calm young gentleman's pale face. "Mr. Christopher will have plenty of time for you to teach him something about play, but I think he'll want to know some of the things that I can teach him too. Eh, Christopher?" His hand smote Christopher on the shoulder with rough geniality.

"But — but — I don't understand," stammered Christopher.

"Don't understand what?"

Mrs. Burroughs intervened. "Let the boy alone, Harvey. He came to see me, and you and Alice are behaving as though you intend to divide him between you, and probably quarrel over him before you're through. John," she turned to the boy, "Mr. Norton is my son Harvey who was with me when we saw you fighting the big weed out in Illinois. I was married a second time, which explains the difference in the names. As for his telling you that you wouldn't come to his office, I haven't the faintest idea what he means."

"I can explain that, mother," the great man said, good-humoredly; "I saw Mr. Christopher in Chatham a year ago and offered him a place in the office. It's a joke you ought to appreciate. I didn't know him at first, and then when I was sure of him, it was too good to tell. I hadn't the heart to spoil the dramatic entrance of the last of the Christophers when the stage was ready and the audience waiting."

Christopher thought there was a shadow of sarcasm in the remark and a sudden, unreasoning wonder came to him as to how much this man knew of the six months at Doncaster.

"Spoil the dramatic entrance, indeed!" scoffed the old lady. "You were ashamed to admit that I was right, Harvey Norton."

"Perhaps, mother, perhaps. Anyway, we have him now and between us we ought to be able to deliver New York over to him, bound hand and foot."

Priestley came up at this moment to make his adieux. A slight constraint fell upon the group. The girl glanced at her father almost appealingly as the great man answered Priestley's parting word with the same curt nod that he had given him for greeting. Evidently the young man to whom the daughter had proposed in the new auto had no welcome at the foot of the throne.

When Christopher made his own adieux and found his way down to the street half an hour later his brain was something less unsteady, but

out of the whirl three causes for wonder stood prominently forth:

Why was the house of Norton apparently so divided over the merits of Mr. Carter Priestley? What did the head of the house mean by his reference to getting down to business? And why had the same august personage made not the slightest reference to Doncaster and the mills in the course of their half-hour talk?

Had he run away from his problems in Doncaster only to plunge into the midst of new riddles in New York?

CHAPTER XII

A MATTER OF BRIDGES

THOSE things which youth can forget in a few short weeks are only to be equaled in number by the new tricks which it can learn. To bow and smile correctly, to dress becomingly and in the fashion, to talk easily and with an air of intense interest about nothing at all, to dance, to ride, to be tremendously busy and never to do anything, to be elaborately idle and never to seem so, to have nothing to do and yet never to find time hanging heavy on one's hands, to entertain and never bore, to be entertained yet not a burden, in short, to play gracefully everywhere and always with the same absorption that other men devote to painting pictures or writing books or plowing corn or shoeing horses or selling railroads or breaking banks, these are accomplishments that any nimble-footed, quick-witted youth may make progress in in a very short time, especially if he have unlimited money and can command the hands and brains of legions of servitors whose work it is to smooth the paths of those who play.

John Christopher learned quickly. In college he had the reputation of being quite a superior

person socially. Dancing seemed almost an inherited art, so easily and quickly did the rhythm of the music flow into his blood and express itself again in nerve and muscle. He had thought that he could talk, and he knew that he could play any game whose rules were capable of definite statement and explanation. He was not badly educated, as educations go, which is to say he knew some Latin, a little Greek, a considerable quantity of mathematics, a minimum of natural science, and was vaguely at home in an ill-defined territory of history and literature. Almost anywhere he would have passed for a fair shadow of a scholar and would not have been without conceit in the knowledge of that fact.

But the lotus-eaters of the metropolis play a game without rules or precedents that can be stated or defined. They must know many things, but of actual knowledge they have little need. Above all, they must seem to be natural with always an eye to the repression of one's real self. Neutral tints in clothes or character are not popular with youth. Most of us aspire to be nobly good or cataclysmically bad — when we are young. Only age brings the sober hue to temperament and dress alike.

If John Christopher had known at the outset how difficult was the game he essayed to play he would probably have withdrawn in discouragement. But the bridges of life come singly, and one is seldom in sight from another. Kind

friends, one of them an elderly woman of wide experience and authority from which there is no appeal, the entrée to two or three clubs, and an English valet of unimpeachable manners and an instinct for clothes, can work wonders with plastic material in a short time.

Of course, John did not learn it all in the first month. As good men as he have found in the game matter for the study of a lifetime, to die at the end of it with some goal unattained. But John had done marvelously well, even in the eyes of the valet that Priestley had found for him. His little gaucheries really added to his popularity, as Mrs. Burroughs had prophesied. Pocahontas was once quite the rage in London and the bad manners of Li Hung Chang had much more to do with his popularity than his statesmanly wisdom. If the contact is not too violent, the fragile china of humanity rather enjoys at times to find itself touching elbows — or perhaps handles would be more correct — with the rough earthen pots of the world. Perhaps it gives the china a pleasurable feeling of superiority and perhaps there is a little thrill of the exhilaration of danger at the thought of how easily its fragile self might be shattered to fragments fit only for the dust-heap if the shock of contact were a trifle ruder.

John was not an earthen pot exactly. Rather was he a promising lump of kaolin on the potter's wheel, destined to become in time highly fragile and ornamental, when the potters and the burn-

ers and the polishers should have done with him. Even in the unfinished state in which the end of his first month in New York found him, he was not without a vogue. Already a few less popular young men were regarding him with envy and preparing to add to his prestige by surreptitious criticism. John's preceptress was wise and knew the dangers of both the slowness of the snail and the speed of the Limited. She had no intention that her young protégé should illuminate the sky of New York with the sudden glare of a rocket or wear out its patience with the fitful spluttering of a slow match. Therefore she made haste slowly.

John made his bow to the great world at a small but carefully planned dinner party which to all outward seeming was different in no important respect from hundreds that are given every year. In fact, it was rather simpler than usual. The newspapers might have had difficulty in assigning more than an eighth, or perhaps even a ninth, of the wealth of the city to the guests. With the exception of one young man who had published a book of sonnets — at his own expense — and another who had been known to paint water-colors almost as good as some of those which are nearly hung at the Academy, there was no one present who had ever accomplished a more remarkable feat than keeping out of the newspapers save for an occasional brief mention of a name.

But one and all were adepts at the great game, or some phase of it, and Mrs. Burroughs was the social banker of each. One and all held the keys to some one or more of the rooms in the temple of fashion to which but few held all. Upon these votaries John's chaperone relied as a master craftsman upon the boys who hold his tools or run his errands. Nothing, absolutely nothing, happened at the dinner. Where the domestic machinery moves with well-greased wheels along channels worn smooth by long use there is no danger that the roast will be under- or overdone, the wine too cool or not quite cool enough, the game too fresh or unpleasantly the other way, the dessert not iced to just the correct point of relish. In other words, the hostess had none of the worries that attend the social spasms of her only fairly well-to-do sister and ate her dinner with as little trepidation as though she had not been in her own house at all. Nor did John commit any of the numberless small social sins which are supposed to be characteristic of the outlander's first sally into the sacred precincts of those born with a gold fork in the left hand.

He had taken out Miss Alice Norton, she of the vivacious humor and the quick tongue, and had talked to her with as much intelligence as the occasion demanded, and little more. In the course of the dinner he had time to notice two things, that her eyes were blue and that Mr. Carter Priestley was not among those present. When he

incautiously mentioned the latter fact, the young lady elevated her eyebrows slightly, but said only: "Why, that's so; he isn't, is he?" And John wondered if it was mild wonder over his astuteness in discovering Mr. Priestley's absence or sarcasm at his mention of the fact that lay in her apparently shallow remark.

What they talked about and what John said occasionally to the lady at his other hand doesn't matter now. It mattered little enough then. At the end of the evening, however, he was conscious of two more discoveries: one was that the profession of playing was likely to be a very popular occupation with him, at least from his experience; the other that Miss Alice Norton was a very pleasant person to talk to and that blue eyes do not make dinner-table conversation any the less pleasant, especially when the rest of the young lady's personal endowment is in keeping with the eyes. He walked back to his hotel after the dinner decidedly in his own good graces. Doncaster was a bad dream, a smoky nightmare of the past, shot through with flashes of sulphurous flame which were rapidly growing dimmer. His cares slipped from him as the troubles we lie awake with at night disappear in the sunlight of the early morning.

The next day he installed himself in comfortable bachelor apartments not far from where the two most famous restaurateurs in the United States face each other in deadly conflict a la carte

with Fifth Avenue between them. Three days later he placed himself in the hands of the English valet with the unimpeachable manners and the instinct for clothes to whom reference has already been made. This necessary adjunct to his daily life was recommended by Priestley, who seemed always to know just where to find whatever anyone else wanted but never to find it for himself.

And so young John Christopher sat him down among the lotus-eaters — or the flesh pots of Egypt, according to one's attitude toward the picture he presented. So much for the new stage-setting. Now for the play, which, perforce, moves slowly after the manner of all well-ordered society dramas.

It was over a month after the appearance of the valet in the select bachelor apartments that John had an appointment with Miss Alice Norton in which an automobile and an April day played minor parts. The history of the month that intervenes is written for the most part on cards — dinner, dance, calling, and to a limited extent playing. John had justified his preceptress's confidence in him during the month and for this reason, and for another which she did not mention — probably her old-time affection for the boy's mother and consequent trust in him — she raised no objection to her granddaughter keeping the appointment with John and the auto and the April day.

John was not in love with Alice that morning.

He did not even think he was. But he was quite wide-awake to her charm and he was not sure but that he enjoyed talking to her more than to any-one he had ever known. If he had attempted to analyze his feeling toward her, he would probably have concluded that it was somewhere between the calm affection he might have felt for a sister if he had had one and the admiration he might have conceived toward a fashionably dressed and well-behaved Bacchante. In the terse vocabulary he was rapidly acquiring, he would have put her down as a "jolly good sort," which may mean a great deal or nothing at all. At any rate, he was not in love with her. Of that much he was quite sure.

The auto bore them through the golden haze of the April day up Broadway to the northern-most end of Manhattan Island where King George's soldiers once guarded the land approach to the beleaguered city. The machine was working smoothly, the chauffeur was the proper combination of skilled mechanician and deaf and dumb effigy, and the April day was devoid of any sign of tears. It was such a day as poets dream of, and, if they are wise, omit to mention in their verses.

The young people talked the sort of nonsense that all young people talk, knowing it for nonsense, thereby having the advantage over their elders. But an insignificant lamp in an obscure stable at the heels of a cow which must ever remain nameless once reduced a great city to ashes. So

a chance remark of Alice's proved to have concealed in it the glowing coal that fired young John's imagination. They were among the rolling hills of Westchester County and the pace was slow.

At one side of the road on the crest of a high hill stood a great house with well-kept grounds sloping away from it on all sides. It was such a home as men built in the old days before the automobile and the steam yacht and the apartment hotel had made the city the Mecca of the nation's wealth. The man who built it was long since dead, but a spinster daughter still kept it in something like the order that its builder's hands and brains had created. In his day it had been a beacon light of affluence and culture. The light no longer burned, but the wick was still trimmed and the lantern polished as carefully as in the old days.

"There, that's the kind of a place I'd like to have." John waved his hand at the house on the hill as they rolled down the slope away from it. "That place has everything else I've seen around New York beaten a thousand miles. Talk about comfort; that's the real thing."

"The kind of a place you'd like!" the girl jibed. "That's the way men talk when they want to give the impression that they're weary of the city and all its works. When you ask them why they don't make their threats good, they blame it on their wives. Why don't you do it?"

"Do what? Blame it on my wives?"

"No, stupid. This isn't Turkey, or even Reno. Why don't you build a country place, or buy one if you find the right kind? You can afford it. Then when you take a wife you can make her promise to love, honor and obey you in a country house. She'd know where she was going to live, anyway, which is more than some women can say. Why not?"

Why not, indeed? But it was not thought of the country house so much as thought of the possible wife in it that asked the question of John. Why not? He had thought of marrying, of course, sometime, as one thinks of giving up smoking or of dying. The girl's chance question gave the thought a sudden sharper significance, as the doctor's terse decision sets a definite sailing date for our voyage to the other world.

Why should he not marry? He loved his liberty, of course, but not as those do who have lost it. Most of his life had been passed among simple-minded, ignorant people who regarded marriage as one of the necessary processes of life. To them it was neither the taking up of a burden hardly to be borne nor the crowning of a glittering romance. They married just as they had measles, because it was one of the inevitable corollaries of living, and the sooner it was attended to the better. John had been long enough in New York to know that matrimony there was too often either an investment or a tragedy — and sometimes both — but the thoughts of a lifetime are

not easily dislodged. The question asked itself over and over, why not marry? Why not, indeed? And close on its heels came the other question, Whom?

"I believe you are actually thinking about it," the girl said.

"I am," said John.

"Really? Where are you going to build it?"

"Build what?"

"Why, your country house, of course. What else would you build?"

"Oh, yes, to be sure. Yes, I'm thinking of building."

"Gracious! Don't be so serious. You speak as though it was a family burying vault."

"Maybe it will be. I've heard of houses that answered that description."

"But you haven't told me where you're going — Goodness! What's the matter?"

There was a sharp explosion, a grinding, rasping bump, and the automobile crunched to a standstill. The chauffeur swung out of his seat. "Inner tube blown out," he remarked with repressed feeling as he groped under his seat for the jack.

"We'll get out and walk around for a rest. How long will it take? Fifteen minutes? All right. Toot the horn when you're ready."

The young people strolled slowly down the road. John glanced at the gay, unconscious face of his companion and pondered an idea that had

come to him with her idle talk about a country house. The sun shone brightly through a gossamer veil of light vapor that rose from the brown earth, already touched with green here and there. Bluebirds and robins were abroad and the buds on the trees and bushes were swelling with promise of bloom and leaf. They were in a little valley down which a gentle breeze moved, bringing a faint tang of smoke to their nostrils. Spring was in the air and John Christopher felt the stir of it in his blood.

Once or twice as they walked side by side, Alice stumbled on the uneven road, and her soft, warm hand brushed his. Once he touched her arm to guide her around a pool of mud and water. It was not the first time he had felt the velvety warmth of her hand and only that morning he had taken her arm in helping her into the car. But that was different. Even so a bank clerk shuffles the wealth of the Indies through his fingers with no thought of anything beyond his day's work until the day comes when need or greed or ambition or vanity brings into action the particular set of brain cells whose functioning is theft. John had walked with other girls on other April days and thought of nothing but the comradeship of the moment. But now another set of brain cells was in full activity. He wondered if he was in love.

"But you haven't told me about your country house yet." The girl took up the ball of con-

versation where they had dropped it when the inner tube broke in on the talk.

"How should I know? Give me time. This is the first day I've been a mile away from Fifth Avenue since I landed in New York six weeks ago."

"Oh, do say Westchester County. I love this country, the hills, and the streams, and the woods, and all. I'll love you forever if you'll say Westchester." The tone was light and the words as careless and meaningless as though she had addressed them to a well-washed mastiff or the obelisk in Central Park, but the tone of John's reply was serious.

"Will you? Do you mean it?"

"Why, of course, I — why, what do you mean?" She stopped and stared at him, her eyes wide and a look almost of fright in them. The color left her face and she drew back a step with her clenched hands pressed to her breast. "I — I — don't understand," she stammered.

"Don't look so frightened," he urged, striving to take one of her hands in both of his. "There's nothing to be afraid of."

For the first time in their acquaintance he felt himself her superior. "I love you, Alice, I really do, very much. If I build this country house — or any other — I want you in it with me."

He was very sure about his feelings now. Conviction trod upon the heels of speech as anger follows a blow.

"I thought you cared for me a little — and when you said you'd love me forever —"

"But that was only a joke," she broke in breathlessly. "I didn't mean the way you say — you know I didn't. If I had I wouldn't have said it."

"Then you don't care for me?" The boy's tone was compounded of wounded love and outraged vanity.

"I care — like you very much." She was almost pleading with him. "I wouldn't have come out with you if I hadn't liked you. I never bother with people I don't like. You know that. But this — this is different."

There was nothing in her words to suggest anything but maidenly shrinking and surprise, but in her tone and manner there was a hint of terror, of a slow yielding to an inevitable fate. John felt it as a chill to his love or his pride.

"I'm sorry I frightened you. Forget it if you can and forgive me. We can go back to the car now. I should think Peter has probably exhausted his available stock of profanity by this time," he added, with an attempt at lightness.

"Wait!" She held out her hands beseechingly. He saw the shadow of terror still in her eyes and could not misconstrue the gesture. "Don't misunderstand me again. I — I appreciate the honor you have done me — and — and I don't want you to think that my answer is final. I haven't answered you yet, anyway, have I?"

She smiled dimly. "I'll think it over — I will really. Only don't — don't urge me. And please don't tell papa or grandmother until I say you may. Will you?"

The boy's wounded pride was not proof against the appeal in her tone. She was asking him to protect her against herself. The terror and the shrinking that was not of maidenly modesty were still in her look, and he wondered at the contradiction of fear and trust which she presented.

"Certainly not. I should not think —" he began stiffly. Then he broke off boyishly. "Say, look here. You don't have to think of it at all, if you don't want to. I'll get over it in time, I reckon, and you mustn't worry if I don't. It's all right. Let's go back and see if Peter has sworn a new tire on yet."

Again the girl detained him. "But I mean it. I will really think it over — really."

He smiled at her earnestness, as one smiles at the earnestness of a child. "That's all right. I understand."

But he didn't at all and it was not until some weeks later that full comprehension came to him. The ride back to the city was a quiet one. At first the girl had attempted to get back to the basis of nonsensical chatter on which they had stood before, but her efforts were met with silence or at best monosyllables. Finally she too was silent and they rolled along over the smooth road, wordless and smileless.

John's thoughts could be represented best by a large question mark. What did she mean? Why did she fear him? Was it he she feared? If not, who or what was it? And the only one who could have banished the interrogation point from his mind was busy with her own thoughts or fears, and had never a word to say to his.

By the time they reached her grandmother's house, where he was to set her down, he had about arrived at the conclusion that the terror he saw in her eyes was the product of his own imagination. She loved him or she didn't. Either way her course was plain. A simple yes or no, and the problem was solved. Thus do woman's troubles usually appear to a blundering man.

"Thank you for a very pleasant ride," she said as she gave him her hand at parting, and neither smiled at the unconscious sarcasm. He looked back as Peter swung the machine around and saw her run lightly up the steps.

"Not very sad now," he thought. "What the dickens is it all about, I'd like to know. Ask a girl to marry me and she gets scared to death. Then when I offer to take it back she gets even worse scared and asks for time. You'd think I was a cannibal king and she was a missionary and was afraid either to convert or feed me. Then when we get back she says, 'Thank you so much,' as though I'd brought her a box of candy, and runs up the steps. It's too much for me."

But he was more sure than ever that he was in

love and as Peter drove slowly up Fifth Avenue, keeping an eye on cabs and pedestrians and traffic policemen, his master in the tonneau was congratulating himself on having behaved very nicely in a rather trying situation. By the time he had reached his rooms he was quite content with his anomalous position and as he opened the door of his quarters he came to the comforting conclusion that he was to all intents and purposes an engaged man.

Two letters were lying on the table in his sitting room. One was obviously from dad. The other was in a woman's writing, and this one he opened first. It was from Eve Walcott, the first she had ever written him save a few typewritten business letters which she had signed with her father's name, "per E. W." John had written her soon after he reached New York, and the general character of his letter may be guessed from Miss Eve's remark after she had read it through. "Just what I thought! He's nothing but a selfish pig. All he wants of the mills is the money they make for him."

Her wise old father overheard and saw the vicious jerk with which she tore the letter across and across again, and knew in his heart that that was not what she had thought at all. She had not answered his letter at the time and wrote now only to say that she was to be in New York for a few days soon and her father had suggested that Mr. Christopher might like to see someone who

had come direct from the mills. If so, she should be happy to answer any questions he might care to ask, etc., etc., etc. Meanwhile she was his very truly, etc., etc.

The aforesaid Mr. Christopher was much surprised at the pleasure that the thought of seeing Miss Eve Walcott gave him. He held her letter in his hand and called up a vision of her as he had seen her almost daily during those terrible six months at Doncaster, and he was amazed to find that her neat, shirt-waisted figure, her brown hair, and her piquantly serious face made the only pleasant picture that he had brought away with him.

"By Jove, I believe I'll be glad to see her," he ruminated. "My enemy, she called herself." He smiled at the recollection. "Wonder if she'll let me take her around a little. I can show her a good time in this old town, if I do say it myself." He filled a pipe slowly and lighted it. "The opera's over, but the theaters are still going and the restaurants are always on the job. Then there's the car. We can burn up a few of the roads around New York."

With thought of the car came thought of Alice, and the pipe went out as he pondered this new phase of the matter. Ought an engaged man be showing the sights of New York to any young lady except his fiancée?

"But she isn't my fiancée," he reflected. "At least she doesn't know it — yet. She told me to wait, but — hang it! I've got to do something

while I'm waiting. I can't sit around with my hat on my knees like a messenger boy waiting for an answer, till my lady sends down word whether she's in or out. What's the odds? I am in love with Alice and I'm not with the other, nor she with me. That's sure anyway. Wonder what dad says."

He tore open the other letter and settled himself to read more comfortably. This letter was longer than Eve's.

"Dear son," it ran, "I've been thinking a good deal about you lately, more than my occasional letters might indicate, and you'll pardon me if I say I've been worrying a little. There's no use denying that I was somewhat disappointed when you went to New York. At first I thought your stay was to be only temporary, but from your last letter I gather that you have settled down for a long visit. Now I don't intend to preach, son, and though I'm only an old farmer, I know enough about New York not to regard it as the cesspool of humanity that some of my neighbors think it is. There were some mighty good people there in my time, and I don't believe they are all dead yet.

"I know you, too, and I know that my boy can never go far wrong. But it isn't always the biggest sinners who suffer most, and sometimes shorn lambs are caught out in a blizzard that would be nothing at all to a hardened old goat. But I promised not to preach, didn't I?

"This is what I want to say, and you won't mind if I say it right out bluntly. It's the only way I know. You were brought up to take your father's burdens on your shoulders. Anyone could spend his money, but only the son of his blood and of his spirit can be to the Christopher Mills what he was. I know that the six months you spent at Doncaster were hard ones, but the man hasn't been born yet, son, who knows how to walk on thistles barefooted without getting a few pricks. I don't imagine they can do it even in New York.

"It takes time to learn anything; even running a steel plant can't be picked up overnight. Your father knew that, but he knew, too, the dangers that wealth brings around a young man. That was why he wanted you to come into your fortune with a steady head on a sound body and nothing in it but sane ideas, clean thoughts, and right desires. I know that you have these, and I know, too, that you will not make your father out a dreaming visionary or prove me false to the trust he placed in me.

"Perhaps you wonder then why I am writing you in this way. This is the reason. Youth is apt to wander now and then out of the beaten path of duty and to think that it can easily find its way back whenever it likes. But pleasure and fancy beckon, the hills are beautiful to see, the air is clear and stimulating, and the path of duty is dusty and winds around in a barren, smoky val-

ley. So youth wanders on and imagines that when it has picked all the flowers in sight and heard a few more birds sing, and drunk again at the hill spring, it will go back to the dusty, smoky valley and the beaten path.

"But the hills are many and high and the valley cannot be seen from any of the heights to which youth ascends. Or perhaps the way back is plain but one cannot travel it because he has unwittingly burned the bridge over a chasm which separates him from it. Or again he may awaken to the need of a hasty retreat only to find that the dwellers in the hills have bound him while he slept so that he must remain forever a prisoner among them.

"It is to save you from this fate that I am writing as I do. I believe that you intend to go back to the valley and I believe, too, that you will do it. So that after all, son, I am only a fanciful, fearful old man writing about something he knows nothing about. Forgive me, will you, and write soon to Your loving

"Dad."

John laid the letter down beside Eve Walcott's and cursed himself for a blind fool. For twenty years this old man had labored unselfishly to keep his trust to the dead and he, the young lord of the manor, the last of the Christophers, had thrown it away petulantly after six months' trial. He had sold his birthright for a mess of pottage

and he was not sure of the pottage. He had gone gayly to a task that other more sensible men would have approached with fear and trembling, and he had abandoned it weakly after an experience that would only have spurred those others to renewed effort. He lashed himself with scorn and tore his vanity to tatters. He tramped up and down the room and vowed that he would go back to Doncaster this very week — to-morrow. He would prove to Dad, to himself, to Eve Walcott, his friendly enemy, that he was a Christopher, the last but not the least of the name. He would make his home among his people and prove by his living that he was one of them.

Would he? He thought of Alice and his arms fell limply and he dropped into a chair. What of Alice? He had asked her to marry him and he was pledged to wait until such time as she saw fit to speak. It was unfair, of course, and it was his own fault. He who dances must pay, and he is fortunate if he pays for no dancing but his own. What if Alice should say yes? Would she live in Doncaster? He could smile at the thought. A born and bred New Yorker might conceivably consent to live elsewhere, but that elsewhere would scarcely be dirty, smoky Doncaster. At any rate he must await her decision. The way from the hills of pleasure to the smoky valley where lay the dusty path of duty was plain to see, but he had set the torch to the bridge that lay between and offered his limbs to be bound.

CHAPTER XIII

TWO GIRLS AND A MAN AND SOME OTHERS

ONE woman disrupted Eden, alone and unassisted, save by her curiosity and her appetite. If there had been two for the task, it is interesting but awe-inspiring to consider the probable changes in the third chapter of Genesis. But it is well to leave the contemplation of such fearsome matters to French playwrights and English women who write novels.

John Christopher went to his first meeting with Eve Walcott with mingled feelings of pleasurable anticipation and nervous trepidation, plus a slight flavor of unwillingness. He would not and yet he would. He feared and was disgusted with his fear; he hoped and wondered why. In short he was an average young man paying a call to an average young woman with whom he had had various passages at arms, whom he regarded with some distrust and not a little respect, and whose feelings toward him, he was sure, concealed no bright illusions about himself.

The address she had given him in the letter was the Dolly Madison, a hotel distinguished for its accommodation of none but women, as well as for the great joy which its establishment and sub-

sequent vicissitudes had given two or three newspapers better known for their sense of humor than for their accuracy. John feared the Dolly Madison as a self-respecting man fears an afternoon tea or a visit to the dentist; he feared to have Alice Norton know of his call, not because of what she might say but because of a certain cynical shadow that he had detected in her smile at times: and most of all he feared Eve Walcott — too much not to call on her. So he went.

It was nearly a week since the memorable affair with Alice, the auto, and the April day. The auto was still in good health and spirits and the supply of sunshiny, tearless April days was apparently unlimited. Only Alice was uncertain. He had seen her almost daily, but not once had he alluded to the tenuous bond — or barrier — between them. Nor had she suggested it in words, but sometimes a glance or a slight uncertainty in her smile reminded him that she too remembered that day among the Westchester hills.

As he commented ruefully to himself, "She's holding to me with one hand and pushing me away with the other." The phrase was not the most elegant, but it exactly described the situation as he saw it. "Hang it, why can't she put me out of this misery? She knows I love her and she certainly knows by this time whether or not she loves me. I'm patient, but if this keeps up long I'll be *a* patient."

There was a sad lack of sighs and of lovelorn

glances, of sleepless nights and cheerless days, in his waiting. His appetite was unimpaired, his joy in living undulled, his appreciation of the gay panorama of New York life undiminished. He was in love, but not with grief. He fretted at the suspense, but his spirit did not champ its bit or paw the earth.

And so, unanswered lover as he was, he went to call on Eve Walcott. She was in and he awaited her coming in the wide blue and gold sitting room set aside for the use of the few brave males who should venture within the sanctum of the ever feminine. He thanked Heaven that he was the only man in sight and immediately began to wish that he were not. As he waited the guests of the house strolled, strode, or swished past the open door near which he sat, but never a one of them favored him with so much as a glance. If he had expected a fluttering in the dovecote, he was grievously disappointed. They could not have ignored him more completely, he reflected, if he had been a single-cylinder runabout in a park of six-cylinder imported touring cars.

Quick heels clicked on the tiled floor and Eve Walcott stood in the doorway. Five minutes before he had intended to be very dignified and condescending. It was a tribute to the power of woman's influence that after three hundred heartbeats unnoticed in a corner of this exclusive domain of the sex, he should almost spring to meet this brown-haired girl with both hands outstretched.

She blushed a little at the warmth of his greeting, but he gave her no time for embarrassment or displeasure.

"You've saved my life!" he burst out boyishly. "If there were any justice in the world, you'd have three medals and a library."

"Why! What in the world do you mean?" she protested, laughing in spite of herself.

"That's right! Laugh again! Smile if you can't laugh. Every little bit helps. Just to look at me will be an act of mercy to a suffering brother. If you knew what I've suffered these last five minutes."

"Suffered? How? Where?"

"Yes, suffered, here, at the hands of your cold, contemptuous, disdainful sex. Here I've sat for five long minutes — or was it hours? Never mind — small distinctions of time are nothing when one is freezing to death. In that period twenty-five women, by actual count, have passed this door and not one has so much as looked in."

"You didn't expect them to come in and visit with you, did you?"

"The sarcasm rattles off my icy armor harmlessly." He favored her with a glance of dark melancholy. "No, Miss Walcott, I didn't expect them to speak to me or ask me to stay to tea or inquire after my grandmother's health, or even ask me to join the Christian Endeavor Society. But they might at least act as though they knew I was on the map."

"Didn't they look at you?"

"Look at me? They didn't even turn their heads the other way to keep from seeing me. I simply didn't exist. That's why I was so glad to see you." He gasped at the unfortunate speech, but Eve's white teeth showed in a good-humored smile before he could cover his stumble.

"So that was it, was it? And I was actually beginning to feel flattered. *Merci du compliment, Monsieur.*" She swept him a mocking courtesy. "Oh, don't apologize," as he began a stammering explanation. "I bear no malice. I'm glad to be welcomed even as a relief to my more chilly sisters. But you may sit down if you want to, you know."

John dropped upon one of the plush-covered monstrosities that do duty as chairs in every hotel parlor in America from Portland, Maine, to its Oregon namesake. He was still blushing from his awkward speech, but he felt no embarrassment. This self-possessed young woman seemed to have the knack of putting him at his ease even under the fire of her jibes. He remembered how uncomfortable Alice's swift play of words had made him at their first meeting, even though the shafts of her light folly had not been aimed particularly at him.

Eve settled her trim skirts demurely. "Now I am ready to report," she said.

"To report?" he questioned vaguely.

"Yes, on the mill. Don't you want to hear the

latest news from Doncaster? It's still on the map, you know."

"I guessed as much from the fact that my checks are still good. Your father writes me occasionally too. He's rather a better correspondent than his daughter, although his letters are somewhat lacking in local color. Why didn't you answer my letter?"

Now it was the girl's turn to be embarrassed. She remembered the treatment his one letter to her had received and was angry with herself because of the warm color that she could feel rising in her cheeks. He saw the blush and misunderstood it. Then he blushed too and both of them sat silent, staring at the floor. The girl recovered first.

"Didn't I answer it? Well, we've been very busy at the mill, you know. I'm not much of a letter-writer. Typewriters never are. I don't imagine that a bricklayer would find much fun in playing with building blocks."

"But you're not a typewriter," he protested.

"Oh, yes, I am. And a good one, too, I would have you know, sir."

"No. I won't have it." His tone was more masterful than he thought, perhaps more than he meant. The girl stared and her manner changed, hardened.

"Very well, Mr. Christopher. Then I am not. But at any rate I am an employee of the Christo-

pher Mills and you have called to ask after the condition of your property."

She could not well have spoken more plainly, short of a specific warning that their conversation must be confined to the yea, yea and nay, nay of business relations. He felt the change at once and his pride and vanity rose to match it. After all she did operate a typewriter and he was John Christopher, the head of the great Christopher Mills. His tone was as hard as hers when he spoke again.

"I shall be glad to hear anything you care to tell me about Doncaster."

"There is little to tell after all," she answered in a brisk, businesslike manner. "Father has told you probably that we have had three big orders since you left. The Montreal and Pacific Railroad has ordered 50,000 tons of bridge material. The Billings Construction Company has placed practically their entire orders for the year with us. And the steel in the new statehouse at Hendricksburg is to be the product exclusively of the Christopher Mills."

He bowed his acknowledgments. "Your father told me, but I am glad to hear it again. He said something about delivery that seemed to worry him a little, although I didn't quite understand it. Perhaps you can explain."

"Yes, it's a little strange, but I think father is needlessly disturbed. All of these orders have

heavy forfeiture clauses in the contracts if the steel is not delivered by the first of November."

"November's a long way off. I should think he could do it."

"He can." The girl's chin went up a little. Perhaps she was glad, too, of the chance to explain to this young man some of the details of the business which was the source of his income. "It will be easy enough if nothing happens. But you know we use a special grade of ore in the Bessemers, a low percentage of phosphorus." She glanced at him to see how he would receive this bit of elementary information in the steel-maker's art. He merely nodded as before.

"The supply of this ore is limited," she went on, "and if anything were to happen to limit it still more, we might be seriously embarrassed. That is one of the things father fears. Another is accident. Sometimes fire or explosion will cut down a mill's capacity. I remember once when I was a little girl one of the converters broke and the whole charge of molten steel flew out in every direction. A number of men were killed and that part of the building was wrecked. Oh, it was horrible!" She shivered at the recollection. "Sometimes I hate the mills, Mr. Christopher," she broke out. "They are so huge, so unfeeling, so relentless. The men seem such tiny things beside them, like ants crawling around the edge of a crater."

John remembered that he too had felt some-

thing of this on his first visit to the mills and his stiffness relaxed visibly.

"But I forgot. You wanted to know about the orders." Her voice was even again as she went on. "Those are two of the things that might happen to delay delivery. The other is a strike."

"A strike?" he exclaimed. "There's no likelihood of a strike at Doncaster, is there?"

"No likelihood, but always a danger. Your men have been faithful workers, Mr. Christopher, but the last six months have unsettled them." She might have spared him that thrust, he thought, but he said nothing. "A strike would ruin us. It's odd too that the people who placed these orders refused to insert a strike clause in the contracts. It's the usual thing to have one, you know, and father held out for it till they raised the price and laughed at his fears. They were right, of course; there has never been a strike at Doncaster and there's no sign of one now. The mills are running night and day and the year will be one of the most prosperous we have ever had."

He noticed that with the single exception of the reference to the faithfulness of his men she had spoken of the mills always in the first person plural. It was "we" and "our," not "you" and "your." It was probably unintentional, but he writhed in spirit at this further sign of his complete exile from his kingdom. One thing he would not humble himself to do: He would not ask if there was any living remnant of the ruins of his abor-

tive work for the men. Not by word or look would he confess that he remembered his six months of agony in Doncaster. That part of his life he had put behind him, and each day found the thought of his ultimate return dimmer and less of a nightmare to him.

"I think that is all," she said. "Unless you want to ask about something."

There was anticipation in her glance at him, but he would not gratify it. "Thank you, no. There is nothing. Your report has been most complete."

His manner was stiff and he rose as he spoke. "I shall see you again before you return, shall I not?"

"Do you want to? Pardon me," she followed the question quickly. "I didn't mean to be as rude as that sounded. Of course, I shall be glad to see you at any time and tell you anything about the mills that I can. Father says I'm almost as good as an assistant manager, but really all I know about the business is odds and ends of his knowledge warmed over. I am kind of a boarding house breakfast of information, you see."

"I can't agree with that," he began formally. "I'm sure that no one could — oh, hang it, Miss Walcott," he broke off impetuously. "Let's chuck the mills and find something we can talk about without quarreling."

"Why, were we quarreling? I didn't know it."

Her tone was innocent, but a shadow of a dimple lurked in her rounded cheek. He saw the shadow and wondered if it was in his power to call forth the substance.

"You haven't been, but I have — internally. You haven't meant it, of course, but every word you've said has been an indictment of me — for criminal incompetency and ignorance."

"Mercy me! Is it as bad as that? Then you should be convicted by this time. Or are you only convinced?"

The dimple flashed out as she smiled and he saw its mate in the other cheek. "By Jove, two of them! I knew it," he burst out unthinkingly.

"Two of them! What do you mean, Mr. Christopher?"

He was overwhelmed with confusion, but rallied nobly. "I — I meant both of them. Convicted and convinced both, you know. That was what you said, wasn't it? I always say two for both. It's so much more definite."

"Is it? I hadn't noticed it."

The ice was thin around that subject and John hastened away from it. "But you haven't told me yet whether you'll let me take you out a little while you're here."

"You haven't asked me."

"Then I ask you now. Will you do me the honor to take dinner with me to-night, Miss Walcott? And go to the theater, too?"

"But is it proper for a young and highly susceptible girl to go out alone to dinner and to the theater with a young and —"

"And very hardened man?" He finished the question for her. "Altogether, I assure you. These are the United States of America and we are both of age."

"You are unkind, but correct,— about the age, I mean."

"There they are again," said John, but this time he had the good sense to confine his discovery of the dimples to himself.

"But I shall be glad to go with you. Now I'm going to surprise you. At this point I should say — to myself, not to you by any means —'I haven't a thing that's fit to wear.' On the contrary I have a spick and span new gown and a hat that any proper sort of a stenographer would declare just the sweetest ever. I made them both myself, and they're loves, if I do say it as shouldn't."

"I'm sure of it, and I shall call for you at six —"

"Oh, I beg pardon. I didn't know there was anyone here. Why, how do you do, Mr. Christopher?" It was, of all persons in the world, Alice Norton, John's fiancée — or was he hers? At the moment he was even more confused than ever over the exact nature of their relations and could only blush and stammer like a small boy caught in the jam closet. Alice glanced quickly

from John to Eve and back again, expectantly, he thought. He was furious with himself for his embarrassment, and furious with Alice for no reason whatever. Why should she not come to the Dolly Madison if she wanted to, and yet why in Heaven's name should she have chosen this particular time? There was no reason why he should not call on his manager's daughter if he wished, but he was conscious, too, that the readiness with which he seized upon this silent defense of himself implied a consciousness of disloyalty to Alice.

He blundered headlong into an introduction of the two girls without thought of the wishes of either. "Miss Norton, Miss Walcott; Miss Walcott is the daughter of my manager."

"And Mr. Christopher's stenographer while he was at Doncaster," Eve added quietly.

"Really," said Alice. "How interesting!" And Christopher could not tell for the life of him whether her coldness was the icy chill of jealousy or the formal protest of social prejudice. It might have been either — or the "New York manner" for the matter of that. The situation was decidedly unpleasant for him, and far beyond the ability of his inexperienced social powers to cope with.

Therefore he was mightily relieved when the page appeared with Alice's card. "Miss Broughton is not in, miss."

"Thank you. Will you tell her, please, that Miss Norton called? Here, I'll leave my card."

She turned to go. Poor John, still wallowing in a slough of embarrassment, said haltingly,

"Are you walking toward home, Miss Norton? May I walk up with you?"

The ice was still on Miss Norton's tone. "I should be very glad to have you if Miss — Miss — Walcott, thank you," this to Eve who had prompted her coolly, "will excuse you."

"Oh, that's all right," with suspicious heartiness from John. "We were only talking business." If he had been ten years older he would have known that a reply to an unspoken charge is usually regarded as a confession.

"In that case I shall have no compunction. So glad to have met you, Miss Walcott."

She swept out of the room. John did recover his wits and his manners sufficiently to shake hands with Miss Walcott and to reiterate his intention to call for her at six. The quiet look she gave him was neither suspicion nor curiosity. Rather it was as though she weighed him in the scales of her consideration and added another item to the analysis which stood against his name in her estimation. And then John followed Alice out of the hotel and turned toward Madison Avenue at her side, feeling very much as he imagined a large, fat fly would feel if he were caught in a web of his own spinning — if flies ever spin webs — while the spider sat by and considered whether he should be a dinner or an object lesson.

He loved Alice, he was sure of that, and he did

not love Eve, but the more a man loves a woman the less he enjoys being made a fool of by her, he reflected. And the worst of it was that Alice's behavior had been irreproachably correct, which only added to his discomfort. He was to blame from start to finish and he — and he alone — would pay the penalty. At this point the pendulum of his worry swung back and he found himself wondering why he should worry at all. He had committed no offense and had been accused of none. Even married men might call on attractive young ladies and still keep out of the divorce court. The less reason then that a man who was only half engaged at best should be disturbed over a purely perfunctory call on the daughter of his manager.

Then he remembered that he was walking up Madison Avenue by that young lady's side and realized that no proper sort of gentleman would force a lady to ask the same question more than three times without returning some sort of answer. It may have been significant that neither of them mentioned Eve Walcott from Twenty-eighth Street to Thirty-ninth. Then Miss Norton asked Mr. Christopher in to tea, an invitation which Mr. Christopher declined with profound regret on the ground of a neglected constitution which required exercise more than mild stimulant. So the incident, which John Christopher flattered himself had in it the making of tragedy, was closed.

CHAPTER XIV

SELVES — REAL OR OTHERWISE

A MAN in love is only half a man at best, and an engaged man is rather less than half. What particular fraction of a man is a rich young fool in love with one girl and half engaged to her, who yet discovers a curious pleasure in the society of another young woman — and that other a high-tempered young person who, without shame or self-reproach, declares herself a stenographer — must be left to wiser mathematicians to determine.

John Christopher approached the Dolly Madison to keep his dinner appointment with Eve Walcott in fear and trembling. One moment he considered how he should explain Alice Norton to her; the next he wondered if he had satisfactorily explained Eve to Alice; and the third he heaped abuse upon himself for puzzling over such a useless problem as explaining either to the other. Neither could nor would demand it, and to leap into the arena with such a dangerous subject was to invite unnecessary trouble.

That he would have none of it was his wise conclusion, a decision which was ably seconded by Eve's silence in the matter of Alice. The latter

had steered no wider of Eve on the way home from the hotel than did Eve skirt safely around the numerous conversational coasts where the name of Alice might have been expected or feared.

Yet it was not a remarkably successful dinner, at least during the early stages. Eve's hat and gown gave John's feet the first firm footing they had found for some hours — a remark which must on no account be taken literally. They had progressed through the oysters and the soup and were well on with the entrée when he bethought him of her remark of the afternoon.

"You made them yourself, you said," he interjected in a pause in the conversation which had been concerned hitherto mainly with the difficulty of ordering a good dinner in English when even the most unattractive dishes look appetizing in French.

Eve raised her eyebrows in amusement at the remark. "Do you mean the French or the *vol-au-vents?*"

"Neither one. I mean your hat and gown."

"Who was speaking of them, if you please?"

"I am — you were — anybody would with eyes in his head and any kind of judgment. You really did make them yourself?"

"I really did. I always do. Being only a poor stenographer, I always shall. I can't think of any other moods or tenses to apply to them except the past or the conditional and no one ever uses those for a woman's clothes. But why?"

"I suppose it's fearfully rude to speak of them, but you know I never knew anything about women's clothes till I came to New York, and I don't know much now." "Nor about a great many other attributes of the sex," was Eve's observation to herself. "Down here somebody named Louise or Edythe or Jeannot seems to make all the women's hats and dresses. Or else the fair wearers buy them in Paris and are violent free-traders forever after."

Eve laughed. "Yes, I know. Father says he's glad I don't wear Paris clothes for another reason besides the bank account one. Between his desire to keep the tariff up on steel and mine to drag it down on clothes, there would be no peace for him or for Congress either. You should have had a sister, Mr. Christopher."

"I might offer you the place?"

"That is not very polite, is it? I admit my inexperience, but I've always understood that it was the young lady's place to offer to fill such a position in lieu of a more difficult one."

John surprised himself by breaking out into a laugh. The joke was neither new nor very good, but it seemed to him quite the most delicious thing he had heard in weeks. It was unprecedented, too, in his recent experience that he should not be overcome with confusion at thought of a possible blunder. Instead he had only a consciousness of the delightful feeling of comradeship that Eve Walcott had given him once or twice before. He

gathered himself gayly for the game. "Then I should give you the opportunity to make the offer, shouldn't I?"

"Don't take the risk. I might choose the other alternative."

"No such luck." Perhaps his ruefulness was not all conscious and assumed. "Young ladies don't declare their intentions so openly. I doubt if they even admit them to themselves. In the simple, primitive state of Illinois and ignorance in which I passed my youth even engaged couples deny their fell purpose until the invitations are in the mail."

"After that they deplore it, I suppose." This from the girl.

"No," slowly, "I don't believe they do. Getting married is both simpler and more serious out there than it is here. Less fuss and more feeling. When people marry out there it is for life. Down here it seems to be only till fashions or fancies change in many cases. Sometimes, Miss Walcott, I wish I were back there in Illinois again."

"Is that because of a change in fashion or in fancy?"

"No, but seriously. Did you ever have the feeling that you were two persons?" He leaned his elbows on the table and pushed his coffee cup aside. "May I smoke? Thanks."

She watched him with serious eyes as he lighted his cigar with slow care.

"I don't think I understand quite what you mean," she said.

"I'm afraid I don't either," he answered with a smile at his own inarticulateness, "but it's something like this. You have a name, a place to live, money to spend if you're lucky, things to do and friends to do it with — at least there are people who call you by your first name and borrow money from you. You have your place in the procession, your part in the show, and you get through it in some fashion, good or bad as the Lord and your own sense or ignorance decide. Is this going to be a sermon or a lecture?" he demanded, changing tone and manner abruptly.

"Go on," she breathed, "I'll tell you afterwards."

"Well, you are conscious of the past that has led you unerringly to the place where you stand. You know that what you are, a thousand things over which you had no control have made you — you are an omnibus in which all your ancestors ride; I think someone else said that, but it will do.

"That's the 'you' that people all praise or ridicule or tell lies about. Then there's another 'you' that comes to the surface only once in a great while. That 'you' seems to stand outside the other one and sizes it up and wonders about it. When the feeling is strongest, it doesn't praise or blame or tell lies about the 'you' that people see. I think it usually feels sorry for it.

"That 'you'— the occasional 'you' I mean — is conscious all the time of the thing that should be done, the road that should be followed. It knows that the 'you' that people see is a counterfeit, a cheat, a liar; that there is no reliance to be placed in it; that itself is the real 'you,' but somehow it can't make the other 'you' see it. Then the real 'you' gets dim and helpless, and finally it disappears altogether for weeks at a time. In college we used to talk about the subconscious self, but this is something different. This self is not under but outside the other. And it has to stay outside and hear all the lies that the self with a body and clothes and a voice tells. That's all." He flung his hands out with a gesture of relief. "Now is it a sermon or a lecture?"

"Neither one." The girl's answer was low and her tone serious. "Neither a sermon nor a lecture. Perhaps it's a prophecy."

"A prophecy," he echoed. "How do you mean?"

"I mean the real 'you' may become the 'you' with a voice. It may move into the body and wear the clothes and become the 'you' that people see and hear, and yet still be the old 'you' that knows itself and knows the road it must take. I think that people would not ridicule nor tell lies about such a 'you' as that."

Her eyes were puzzling in their soft intentness. He pushed his chair back almost roughly and dragged out his watch. "Eight-thirty. Good

gracious, we must hurry or miss the first act. I've been talking for hours. You must be bored nearly to death."

"On the contrary I think I've learned something."

"What is it?"

"We'll leave that to the Fates." She lifted her glass of water. "Let's drink to the other 'you'—the real one. May it come to the surface." He imitated her action with a strange look in his face. "To the other 'you,'" he said, "mine and yours and everybody's." To himself he said, "I wish I knew what she means. Or what I mean myself," he added.

Then they went to the theater.

CHAPTER XV

ANOTHER CHANCE OF A LIFETIME

IN the week that followed John saw nothing of Eve, although he spoke with her twice over the telephone. Each time she assured him that she was desperately busy shopping and seeing the sights and doing the thousand and one other things that the outlanders find so absorbingly interesting in New York and the New Yorkers pay no attention to at all. The second time, a week after the evening of the dinner, she told him that her father was "coming on" for a few days and that she would return to Doncaster with him.

Of Alice John saw little more than of Eve. She was seldom in when he called, and on the evening when he dined there at her grandmother's invitation she talked little, which was in her what restlessness would have been in another less well-poised. He would not press her for an answer to his question, and once or twice he caught himself fearing that she would give it. His conscience came to his aid dutifully, but the memory of that sickening sense of anticipation did not leave him for days. Could a man be both willing and unwilling? he wondered. And the incongruous answer to his own question was the thought

that the fires of Smithfield were probably made none the less painful to Ridley and Latimer by the high purpose that drove them to the stake.

But conscience answered this with a reminder that he had made his choice without compulsion of duty or devotion to anything save the object of his own desires. Furthermore, a charming young lady, much desired of many men, rich in her own right, and dowered with all the wealth of youth and undoubted beauty and wit could not properly or politely be compared with sacrificial fires.

"It's all very fine," John grumbled one morning as he watched his valet painstakingly matching tie and shirt for the morning's wear, "but no man likes playing hide-and-go-seek with himself."

"Beg pardon, sir," said the servitor with the English accent and the unimpeachable taste in clothes. "Did you speak, sir?"

"No. I didn't say anything if I did. That's a habit of mine, Wilkins. I've learned it since I came to New York. Oh, take any of them. Anything will do."

Wilkins looked his pain and bent to his task with renewed care.

That was the day that the letter from H. Anisty Norton came to John. The great man had been busy with his own concerns while John and New York were becoming acquainted. He had seen little of John, but he had not forgotten him, and Alice's delay in answering the important question

to which the automobile and the April day had paved the way, was not due to any withholding of the parental blessing. In fact, although ignorant of the exact state of the Christopher-Norton affair he had intimated to his daughter that such a coupling of names in a newspaper head would not be nearly so unwelcome a sight to his eyes as had been a few other matters that he had seen mentioned in print. Perhaps that was one reason why John's mail on the morning of his conversation with Wilkins contained a curt note from H. Anisty Norton stating that if it was convenient to Mr. Christopher, Mr. Norton would be pleased to see him as one of the parties to an important conference in Mr. Norton's office, that day and date. After which he begged to remain as ever.

It is a mistake to assume that whom the gods would destroy they first make mad. That may have been the practice on Olympus when Jove was both chief justice of mundane affairs and sole expert alienist and Juno was not ashamed to do her own housework. Nowadays the deities have many agents in their work of destruction and the technique has been greatly improved. The old plea of insanity is out of date. The sense of power is a much surer means to the suicide of personality than madness to the destruction of the person. The gallery of experience has no sadder or more tragic pictures than those of young men — and women too — gradually accomplishing the annihilation of all that has made them dear and

lovable by too long tasting of the adulation that comes from success too easily gained and too little understood. Failure has its compensations after all, but only the perspective of years will present them at their true value.

That must have been the reason why John Christopher was so unreasonably elated over the curt note from that great man, H. Anisty Norton.

Most unreasonable things have their reasons, given patience and insight in the mind of the seeker. John had tasted failure in the six months at Doncaster and it had not been sweet to him. He was not sure that he was now to know the flavor of success, but at least his importance was by way of being recognized. He was still titular lord of Doncaster and this fact was magnet enough to draw the attention of the great men of the Street to him.

He did not attempt to analyze his feeling. It was unnecessary. At one bound his spirits rose from zero to near the fever point and his breakfast was eaten to the accompaniment of a pounding pulse and an overnatural cheerfulness.

Eleven o'clock was the hour named for the conference and he was there prompt to the minute. It is not necessary to describe the interior of H. Anisty Norton's office as John saw it that day for the first time — the heavy richness of the rugs and the dark green wall covering, the solidity of the furniture emblematic of the position of H. Anisty Norton & Co., the simple appropriateness

of the few pictures which hung here and there about the room. Its like may be seen in any banking house where good taste combines with ability to gratify it. Save for the absence of shelving along the walls, it might have been a gentleman's library, or the inner sanctum of a well-married university professor — anything but the center of a fly-proof web of modern finance.

The Great Man was at his broad, flat-topped, glass-covered desk when the deferential, low-voiced clerk ushered John in; the clerk withdrew with the soft tread of one who thinks always in a whisper.

Norton's greeting was cordial. "You're prompt to the minute, my boy, a good quality in a young man, Marvin."

"And a rare one, too," said the one addressed as Marvin, whom John saw now for the first time. He was a full-lipped, gray-mustached man past middle age, with a chin like a clenched fist. Norton introduced young Mr. Christopher with a wave of his hand. "Gentlemen, Mr. John Christopher, of the Christopher Mills. Mr. Marvin and Mr. Sinjon."

Marvin shook hands with a quick, hard clutch as though he feared some weighty secret would ooze through the tips of his fingers in the process.

The other was more punctilious. He took John's hand in a warm, dry clasp, and held it for an embarrassingly long time.

"I'm glad to see you, my boy, glad to see you,"

he said with paternal cordiality. "I knew your father when he was scarcely older than you. In fact, I think I may say we were boys together, eh, Norton?"

"You may say it, certainly," said that gentleman. "Neither John nor his father can contradict that."

"Yes, boys together," repeated Mr. Sinjon, not appearing to notice the ironic comment. "Dear, dear, it seems only yesterday. And what a man he was. You are like him about the eyes, Mr. Christopher. Very like him."

John remembered what dad and Mrs. Burroughs had told him of his mother's eyes, but he said nothing.

"Well, well, we are all creatures of a moment, creatures of a moment, Mr. Christopher. Like bubbles on a stream, eh, Marvin?"

That gentleman expressed his agreement — or something else — with a grunt.

"But we're very glad to have you with us, Mr. Christopher, very glad, eh, Norton?"

"I've already assured Mr. Christopher that he has my full permission to stay in New York as long as he likes," said the Great Man. "Where's Endleton?"

"He said he'd be here sharp at eleven." This from Marvin. "Here he is now."

The newcomer might have been own brother to Marvin. There were the same full, rather sensuous lips, the craggy granite chin, the same direct,

forceful gray eyes, the same air of impatient energy. John was introduced and felt another quick, hard clutch at his hand. "Glad to see you," to John. "Hope I'm not late," to the others, and the newcomer flung himself into a chair and bit savagely at a long, black cigar.

"We've just been getting acquainted, at least Sinjon and Christopher have," said the Great Man at the flat-topped desk. John was already aware that Sinjon, whose name was rumored to have been St. John in earlier years and to have suffered its elision through the bearer's efforts to Anglicize it, was the target of his associates' rather heavy wit, a fact which caused him no discomfort, as his sense of humor had apparently gone through the same process as had his name.

"Then we'll get down to business at once," said Norton, swinging around in his chair to face the four men who sat across the great desk from him. "Some of us are already in possession of most of the facts, but it will be well to go over the ground again for the sake of clearness, and also for the benefit of Mr. Christopher, who is here for the first time. These gentlemen, Mr. Christopher, represent three of the largest steel mills in the country. Mr. Marvin is president of the Dedham Coal and Iron Company, which is, as you know, of course, one of the largest producers of structural steel in the United States. Your own mills are the only ones that approach it.

"Mr. Endleton is president of the Olivet Steel

and Wire Nail Company. Mr. Sinjon is vice-president and financial manager of the Palestine Steel Works, where most of the government armor-plate is produced." John recalled certain newspaper comments on the Palestine armor-plate in which mention had been made of Swiss cheese for purposes of comparison, and regarded the mild-mannered, paternal-looking Mr. Sinjon with new interest.

"These are all independent concerns and with your own, Mr. Christopher, and other companies from which I have power of attorney to act in a matter which I shall now explain, practically control the output of manufactured steel of all grades in the United States. Mr. Marvin and Mr. Endleton are practical steel-masters and know the process from top to bottom."

"Began as a puddler myself," grunted Marvin.

"Quite so," responded the Great Man, and went on with his explanation, addressing all four men, but seeming to aim most of his statements at John.

"Mr. Sinjon and I have been concerned more with the banking end of the business, a very important part of it, however." Sinjon beamed his acknowledgments.

"There was a time when the steel men of this country were in a state of war among themselves. They cut prices, bulldozed the railroads into giving them preferential rates, fought for coal lands, skinned their customers on contracts to save their

own hides, and raised the devil generally. That time, thank God, is past. For several years there has been peace, and what is the result? What is always the result of peace? Prosperity.

"The reason for this peace after so many years of warfare is the plain and simple fact that the big men in the business, like these gentlemen here, saw that nothing substantial was to be gained by fighting. Competition means one of two things, Mr. Christopher: either the competitors learn wisdom and stop competing, or else one — or perhaps both of them — goes under. In this instance, they stopped competing. A rough schedule of prices was agreed upon, an amicable arrangement was reached for the control of the existing coal and ore lands, and an agreement was made on reasonable and equitable railroad rates. That's where we stand at the present time, Mr. Christopher."

Mr. Norton was leaning forward over his desk and emphasizing his points with jabs of his forefinger at its glass top.

"If we could be sure that we could always stay there, if the present managers or men like them would always be in control, there would be no reason for any change in our relations. But that is what we cannot be sure of. As Mr. Sinjon has reminded us, we are bubbles on a stream," a beam from the authority on bubbles, "and new men will come in who do not remember the old days of warfare and the ruin that they brought. It is our

duty to so safeguard the future that it will have no chance to forget the lessons of the past. So we propose a more secure union — a Holy Alliance of industry — to the end that there may be a lasting peace among the steel men. Am I right, gentlemen?"

Marvin and Endleton nodded. Sinjon gave the Great Man more explicit approval. "Quite right, Mr. Norton, quite right. But if I might suggest, the term Holy Alliance is not quite — well, to be precise, the Holy Alliance of history, if I may be allowed to say so, was not regarded as altogether holy."

"This one will be, Mr. Sinjon," said the Great Man, slightly irritated by this questioning of his sense of historical propriety. "A Holy Alliance and wholly an alliance."

"Very good, v-e-r-y good, indeed. I must remember that; a Holy Alliance and wholly an alliance. Very good indeed." The beam was in commission again.

"In short, gentlemen," the Great Man resumed, "the time has come for an organization of steel men that shall be a combination in name as well as in fact — and one that cannot be broken at the will or whim of any of its members, not a gentlemen's agreement, but a hard and fast corporation. Practically all the leading steel men of the country have agreed to the proposition, Mr. Christopher, and I have delayed informing you until I could be sure that the deal would go through.

The boat is ready to sail, and all you have to do is to step on board with your mills. What do you think of it?"

He leaned back in his chair and lighted a cigar, his eyes on John Christopher. That young gentleman was conscious of a slight confusion of ideas and feelings. The Great Man's exposition of the state of the steel industry, past, present, and to come, had been so rapid and cursory, had assumed so much detailed knowledge, which doubtless all but one of his auditors possessed, that that one was at a loss to express an opinion and conceal his ignorance at the same time. But an opinion of some sort was demanded, and therefore the ignorance must be confessed.

"I'm ashamed to say that I don't know as much as I ought to about such things, Mr. Norton, but it seems to me that whatever you and these gentlemen here and others like them decide is for the best, ought to come pretty close to filling the bill."

It was quite a creditable performance, whether viewed as a naïve confession of ignorance or a modest expression of youthful deference to superior age and judgment. Mr. Sinjon hastened to give it his full approval, although he did not specify whether it was the ignorance or the deference that he approved.

"Very good. Very commendable, indeed, Mr. Christopher. Just what I might have expected from your father's son."

The others merely nodded, apparently not car-

ing to define the exact nature of their expectations from the son of John Christopher's father. Then a question occurred to the young man which pleased him, both as a key to possible further information and as an indication that his ignorance was not so complete and well rounded as he had intimated.

"I understand that this is to be a corporation," he said.

The Great Man nodded.

"A stock company?"

Another nod from greatness.

"Then what about the stockholders in the present companies? This is what I mean." He hastened to explain away what he feared was an apparent hostility in his question. "I hold most of the stock in the Christopher Mills, but there are a few shares held by others, Mr. Walcott, Mr. Phœnix, and Mr. Graham. What about them?"

"I was going on to speak of that," came from behind the great desk. "Of course, nothing will be done without the consent of the stockholders. But modern industry is a great democracy, Mr. Christopher, in which the majority rules. In other words, the real owners of these properties are the men who own the majority of the stock. To let a few men with only a small interest in the business dictate to the managers would be like allowing the votes of a few malcontents to upset the government. You have stated the case in your own mills. Would you let Mr. Walcott and the

other men you named tell you how the mills should be run?"

That was precisely what John was doing, but he shook his head in sage understanding of the point.

"Of course you wouldn't," the Great Man went on. "The majority must rule, and we are the majority." He smote the desk with his clenched fist. "The men who are coming into this combination control the stock of the companies they represent, either directly or through people who have confidence in their judgment and honesty. When they vote aye, it means that the majority vote has been cast in favor of the plan.

"And then there's another advantage," he urged. "Even the few stockholders who oppose it will be benefited. Their new securities will bring them as much money as the old and will be a hundred times safer. They will be living under a guarantee of perpetual peace, instead of with the threat of war always hanging over their heads. They will have as much, and they will hold it more securely.

"To-day the outside stockholders at Doncaster look to you and to you alone for their dividends. In the same way the Dedham people look to Mr. Marvin and the Olivet crowd to Endleton. Under the new plan they will all look to all of us, to you, to Marvin, to Endleton, to Sinjon, to me. Instead of the guarantee of only one man's honesty and ability, they will have that of twenty — thirty,

perhaps. It will be the biggest thing in the world, Mr. Christopher, and one of the best. All the steel mills of the country will be managed as a single concern. The coal beds, the ore lands, railroads, steamship lines, coke ovens, rolling mills, furnaces, they will all work together harmoniously and for the good of all. No one will suffer; on the contrary, everyone will gain, down to the donkey-boys in the mines. The United States government itself will not be stronger, and it won't be half as well run. Now what do you think of it?"

Again the thrust of the heavy body back in the chair; again the lighting of the cigar, with the keen eyes fixed on the young man's face. John's brain was whirling, his imagination was on fire. He was present at the creation of a new world, the forging of a new industrial planet. He, a youth fresh from college, the sap not yet dry in his few ideas about the world and its people, had been asked to sit at table with the lords of steel, the Vulcans of the converter and the steam-hammer. It would be putting it mildly to say he was flattered. He was intoxicated, carried away with his own quick visions, caught up in a mad whirl of gratified pride, of overfed vanity. This was his sphere, this the throne for which he was born. To be sure it would needs be a tolerably roomy throne to accommodate the ten, twenty, thirty kings of steel who would wield the scepter among them. There might be some danger of crowding by such bulky figures as the great man behind the desk, but he

would risk that. At any rate, it would be better than eating the filet mignon of idleness while Walcott tipped the waiter for him. Here was his chance to show his manager — and incidentally his manager's daughter — that the last of the Christophers was not unworthy of the name. There was a new industry and he was to be part of it. Down at Doncaster they knew only the old, and they had cast him out with cold scorn — almost with contempt. Well, they should see!

The Great Man read the boy's rapt look and knew that he had won, and forebore to press his advantage.

"Well, think it over. Don't decide offhand. Talk with your lawyer. Phœnix will see the merits as clearly as any of us. All we want is to be sure that you understand the scheme and that it impresses you favorably. Next week, when the representatives of all the companies meet here, we can thresh out any objections that may come up in the meantime."

He rose and the others followed suit. Fearful that he should not seem properly appreciative of the view from the giddy height to which he had been raised, John interposed a hasty word of approval. "I don't think I need to think about it. Of course, I shall want to talk it over with Mr. Phœnix and perhaps with Mr. Walcott."

The sunshine on the brow of the Great Man was dimmed by a passing cloud. "See Phœnix by all means," he acceded, "but why bother about

Walcott? Between you and me, Mr. Christopher, Walcott is a little behind the times. I don't mean that he isn't a good manager. He is — one of the best in the country. But there is more to business to-day than sitting in your mill and selling goods to people who drop in and ask for prices. Walcott knows nothing of the strategy of business, and that is what we are concerned with here. Tell him what you intend doing, by all means, but don't place too much reliance on what he says about matters outside the mills. I tell you this as a friend."

This last remark is like a foreign label on a traveling bag in its apparent veracity and concealed powers of deceit. To the unthinking mind it stamps the speaker at once as a person of simple honesty who is to be believed implicitly and thanked warmly. John did both.

Old Sinjon unwittingly gave him the first twinge of doubt that he had felt that day. The old man took the young one's hand again into that warm, dry clasp.

"I can't tell you how glad I am to have you with us, Mr. Christopher. It's to be the biggest thing in the world, as our friend Mr. Norton has said, just the thing your father would have liked you to get into."

John left the office with his self-satisfaction somewhat jarred. He knew from what dad and Mr. Walcott had told him that his father's heart had been in the mills, that it had been his pride that he was their head, as his father had been before

him. Would he have relished the thought that the last of the name had passed them over to alien hands, had stood calmly by and seen the kingdom merged into the empire, had even aided in the process? He wondered and the wonder disturbed him.

CHAPTER XVI

PELION APPEARS ON OSSA

HE was a wise man who first suggested to mankind that it take counsel of its fears. The saying is worthy of all acceptation, therefore humanity has consistently ignored it. We follow our hopes rather, and are blinded by the radiance of our own imaginations more often than by any light that shines from without us.

However, John Christopher should be pardoned for a little dazzling by the prospect that the Great Man revealed from the top of the high mountain to which he led him. But it was his own imagining that marked off the kingdoms of the earth in this prospect and disclosed himself set in judgment over them. The light held before him was tended by a skillful hand, but it was a tiny flicker beside the flame that it lighted in John's mind. With prophetic vision he saw himself sitting at the receipt of tribute from the nations of the earth, parceling out the favors of the Empire of Steel with a royal hand, dealing exact, impartial justice among his retainers, courted first for his power and then for himself, receiving the praise of the wise with becoming dignity and re-

jecting the fawning flattery of the base with kingly scorn.

In short, John Christopher dreamed dreams very much after the manner that any other normal young man would have adopted under similar circumstances. Two days he dwelt in his Spanish castle, and then he went to dinner with Eve and her father. Walcott had reached New York on the evening of the day that had known the premonitory announcement of the Empire of Steel. A telephone message to John had apprised him that his manager was in the city at his service.

"There are one or two little things I want to see you about," was the phrase with which the incipient oligarch of industry received the news that his chief vassal was at the gate. "Suppose you and Miss Walcott take dinner with me to-morrow night." A royal invitation is a command and Mr. and Miss Walcott would be pleased to wait upon Mr. Christopher at the time and place appointed.

John was not sure as to how his manager would receive the announcement that he was to make. He was duly mindful of H. Anisty Norton's warning, and he was quite prepared to meet any objections that Walcott might raise with the outward respect and inward indifference to which that gentleman's opinions were entitled on all subjects save the manufacture of structural steel. Mingled with this lofty disdain there was, perhaps, some slight admixture of real respect and even deference for the man who had kept the Christo-

pher Mills roaring day and night while their owner was a barefooted boy on an Illinois farm. The old man had done his work and done it well, and he should not be cast aside in the new day that was soon to dawn — only, he must not interfere. He must learn that all the yesterdays in the world could not make one to-morrow. John would be kind but firm.

His resolution to this effect was somewhat dampened as he eyed the calm, impassive face of his manager across the table in the glittering restaurant where they had found a quiet corner. It was a face where achievement was written in bold, deep lines, without a blot or a mar to speak of failure. John rubbed his own smooth cheek with unconscious furtiveness. This man might be a back number, John thought, with a humorous after-glance at the paradox of life by which back numbers are often the chief stumbling-blocks in progress, but he was decidedly not a nonentity.

The object of the young man's reflections was serenely unconscious of the interest he was exciting. He glanced around with a twinkle lightening the habitual sternness of his face.

"Do you do this sort of thing often, Mr. Christopher?" he asked.

"What is that? Dine here?"

"Yes. Here, or in other such places?"

"Why, daddy," from Eve, "I don't see what you find to object to in this. I think it's very nice."

"Nice? It's magnificent. That's just it. And I'm not objecting altogether. Only I feel as though I were having a picnic in the vault of the United States Treasury. If some of these beautiful women were put through the smelters I think they'd assay about a million to the ton."

"Dollars or sense, daddy?"

Walcott and John groaned at this and the older man remarked, "A few more remarks like that, young lady, and Mr. Christopher will be convinced of the uselessness of testing you for either. He knows your lack of one and he'll begin to suspect the other."

"Well, it may be cold, unfeeling materialism, but I'd almost be willing to give even some of my few brains to be able to enjoy this for a little while longer. Mr. Christopher, I'd like to be you for a month, just to be able to take my dinner in a place like this."

Walcott raised his eyebrows at his daughter's freedom of speech with her young employer. Evidently youth had a password of intimacy that even gates of gold could not prevail against. The younger man seemed not to notice the familiarity of the girl's tone.

"I'm very glad you like it," was his sole reply.

"Like it! It's immense," said the elder. "But I'm afraid I'm too old a dog to learn these new tricks. I should have begun thirty years ago. Now I think such palaces would soon take my appetite away. When I was your age, Mr. Chris-

topher, I was eating my lunch out of a tin pail on a heap of slag."

It occurred to John that it had not been so very long since he himself had shyly taken his seat on the lap of luxury, but he forebore to mention the fact.

"But don't any of these people have homes?" Walcott pursued. "This town seems to be made up principally of restaurants, theaters, and sky-scrapers. Eve is of the opinion that there are a few people here who think of other things besides making money and spending it, but I'm doubtful. I went into the office of a man to-day whom I've known for twenty years. He knew I didn't want to borrow money or sell him anything, but his secretary brought back word that he'd see me to-morrow at ten o'clock. I don't think he will, though."

"You're old-fashioned, dad. Isn't he, Mr. Christopher? Dad thought his friend should have asked him in and told him all the news and then had him up at his house for dinner."

"Why not? That's what I would have done if he had come to see me at Doncaster. I've been reasonably busy all my life, but I was never so busy that I didn't have time to say 'How d' do' to a friend and ask him out to the house. How do *you* like New York, Mr. Christopher? As a place to live in all the rest of your life, I mean?"

This was the opening John was waiting for. He had sat uneasily under Walcott's cheerful crit-

icism, but he did not feel himself enough of a New Yorker yet either to meet them with the calm, satisfied indifference of the born Manhattanite or the active, voluble defense of the transplanted product. But he had a message on his mind and this seemed a favorable time for unburdening himself.

"I like it tremendously, as far as I've gone," he began tentatively. "After a while I hope to like it better."

"After a while," Walcott interrupted, ignoring a warning glance from his daughter. "Then you intend to stay here permanently. We — that is, I," he gave enough recognition to the warning glance to achieve a hasty change in the pronoun. "I had hoped that you —"

John saw what was coming and flipped the ashes from his cigar.

"New York is my home now, Mr. Walcott," he said hurriedly, almost breathlessly. "Arrangements are on foot that will probably make it necessary for me to spend most of my time here." Eve's mind flew back to the young lady she had seen in the Dolly Madison and added what she thought were two and two — or one and one — together. But the mathematics of life sometimes baffle even a woman's intuition, as John's next words proved.

"These arrangements have to do with the mills, Mr. Walcott, a great deal to do with them."

"Yes?" The older man's face hardened visibly. Was he to be turned out after all his years

of service? But his intelligence was at fault, equally with his daughter's intuition.

John drew a long breath and plunged headlong into his story.

"A combination of all the important steel men of the country is being formed and I have been asked to join it."

"A combination? What do you mean? We already have agreements — dozens of them. There hasn't been a serious fight these fifteen years."

"Precisely." John felt a favoring breeze of confidence fill the sails of his narrative. "There are agreements and understandings, but are they enough? Some of us think not."

Walcott noted the "us" and smiled a little grimly. Evidently he was outside its vague shelter. John drove on.

"What we propose is a combination in name as well as in fact." He prided himself on remembering so much of the Great Man's oration. "A corporation is to be organized — in fact, the consent of a majority of the stockholders of all the important companies has already been secured. The others will have to come in, whether they want to or not."

So he went on. For full fifteen minutes he spread before his guests' eyes as complete a copy of the great master's picture of industrial peace, plenty, and profit as his amateur hand could achieve. He painted in warm colors the blessings

of harmony and the horrors of war, as nearly as he could remember them, dwelling particularly on the benefits that would accrue to the Christopher Mills. What he lacked in detail he made up in enthusiasm.

When he had finished he sat back triumphantly and lighted a cigarette with an airy gesture. Walcott noted that the young man spoke of it as a fact already accomplished, not asking the elder's opinion or advice. Eve eyed her father expectantly. She at least had no doubt of his right to sit in judgment on anything that concerned the mills. Walcott blew a great puff of smoke at the high ceiling and watched it disappear as the clouds roll from the top of a factory chimney. Then he turned his gaze on John and the young gentleman felt for an instant the contraction of the muscles around the heart that he had known once or twice under dad's disapproving eye. The sheer weight of inertia with which age bears down upon the shoulders of youth is not easily to be lifted, and even the conceit of untried three and twenty shrinks before the wisdom of experienced sixty.

John could bear the silence no longer. He had not meant to seek his manager's opinion, but the applause he had expected was slow in coming. "What do you think of it?" he asked.

"I don't know yet," was Walcott's slow answer. "I shall have to have fuller information before I can say what I think of it."

"But I have explained it fully," John protested.

"No. Pardon me, Mr. Christopher, if I speak plainly, but you have told me only the part that Norton told you. What I should like to know are the things he didn't tell — the plans in the back of his mind that he will never lay bare until they have been accomplished."

"But there are none." John's vanity was touched by the suggestion that he had not been admitted to the innermost recesses of the Great Man's confidence, and he spoke with some heat.

"No?" Walcott's smile was faint and grim. "Then it's the first time that he's told all that was in his mind. I've known H. Anisty Norton by reputation as many years as you are old, Mr. Christopher, and you may believe me when I say that you can never guess at his destination by the way he's heading. When he goes into a deal he puts his shoes on wrong side first — and gum shoes at that. He's the sort of man who always keeps one hand in his pocket so that it won't see what the other hand's doing. And from what I hear the other hand is usually in some other man's pocket."

"Mr. Norton is a great man, Mr. Walcott." John felt bound in duty to defend his patron and potential father-in-law. Eve bristled a little, as she always did at any rebuke to her father, but the latter only smiled.

"Of course, and I am not. He could buy and sell me every minute of the day, as far as that goes, and I don't doubt that he would do either if it

suited his purposes. But we won't quarrel over Mr. Norton. You asked me my opinion of this scheme?" John nodded.

"I stand or fall by Doncaster, Mr. Christopher, with your permission. A proposition of this sort is good or bad to my eyes according as it helps or hinders us down there. That is, of course, as long as I am manager. Even if I were not, I doubt if it would make any difference. I'm not boasting, but I've lived my life in the mills and a change that threw a cloud over Doncaster would be more bitter than death to me."

John was touched by the other man's words. He knew only a little of what those long years of service meant to the man who had given them, but that little appealed to his imagination and he vowed to himself with instant, boyish fervor, that his faithful retainer should never know hardship through any act of his.

"I've thought of that, Mr. Walcott, and that is one of my reasons for favoring this combination." Walcott leaned forward with an inquiring look. "Yes, the strongest reason." John was sure now of the altruism of his motives. "What helps the trade helps Doncaster. The two are bound together."

"Are they? Are you sure?"

"Of course, I'm sure. Didn't Mr. Norton say so?"

"That's why I ask if you're sure. Mr. Christopher, I distrust that man. If it runs with his

interest to further yours, he will take as good care of you as though he were your own father. If it doesn't — I know nothing, Mr. Christopher, but I'd like to know a lot of things. Norton is not the only man in this. Marvin is one of the ground-floor partners, you say, and I know Marvin of old.

"You speak of peace. There can be no real peace as long as the Dedham works and the Christopher Mills are on the same planet. He can't hurt us now because his best weapons have been taken out of his hands by the coke people. But to think of Marvin and the head of the Christopher Mills sitting down at the same table is like the devil and St. Peter going to church arm in arm. When I see oil mix with water and melted steel change to rose leaves I'll believe it possible, but not till then."

"Then you oppose my plan?"

"It is not for your manager to oppose or to approve, Mr. Christopher. As long as we can buy pig-iron and coke and sell steel, I'll run the mills for you, till I'm dead or another man wears my shoes. But if you want my opinion, I'm the first white child born in Missouri."

He pushed back his chair and stood up. "We must go now. You must remember that Eve and I are simple strangers from the country, Mr. Christopher, and we are accustomed to go to bed with the roosters."

"He doesn't really sleep in a chicken-coop, Mr.

Christopher." Eve's gayety was a bit forced, but they were only too willing to laugh.

"Will you do one thing for me, Mr. Christopher?" Walcott said, as they separated at the sidewalk. "It's one of the privileges of age to ask favors of young men, without regard to relative position."

"You need not regard it, sir," John answered with sincerity. "When I look at you I know who is the real head of the Christopher Mills, and it is not I."

"Thank you," said Walcott simply and Eve smiled at John with more kindness than she had shown in her look since mention of the proposed combination had poisoned the feast. "I appreciate that. Then as an old man and the real head of the Christopher Mills," he strove to lighten his tone and succeeded measurably, "I wish you would ask H. Anisty Norton just what he intends to do with the Christopher Mills. Don't let him put you off with vague assurances, but insist on details. Make him get down to brass tacks, if you can. You can't make him stay there if he chooses to slide away later, but you'll have something to throw in his face. Get him hot if necessary. If a man like that ever tells the truth, he'll do it when he's angry. That's all. Now good night."

John shook hands with his guests, who were warm in their praise of his dinner. They were returning to Doncaster the following day and he would not see them again.

"When you are tired of New Doncaster," said Walcott. "W back."

John shook his head with a wry a long way from Broadway to D New York is pretty good to me."

"'Beware of the Greeks,'" quoted remembered another occasion when and their gifts had figured in the conver did not smile. As he turned to walk up nue, buttoning his coat against the air stil with the tang of spring, he stumbled against a coming out of the restaurant. It was Ca Priestley. "Hello, Christopher. Saw you the restaurant. Who was the pretty girl?" H tone was more cordial than usual.

"That was Mr. Walcott, my manager, and his daughter," said John with chill precision.

"So? Which way you bound? I'll walk with you if you don't mind?"

"Home, I think," said John, his ill humor melting before the warmth of the other's unwonted cordiality.

They fell into step and strode on toward Fifty-ninth Street, Priestley chatting easily of the little things that appeared to make up his day's work. John listened with half an ear, the other ear and a half devoted to his own inward reflections on the great opportunity and Walcott's disquieting comments thereon. A question of Priestley's struck through his absorption.

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e no real he Chris- e can't been But to-

"Haven't seen you at the Nortons' lately. Busy?"

"So, so." John's air of kindly condescension was beautiful to behold. "Two or three things have come up that have occupied a good deal of my time."

"That so? Had one of them to dinner to-night, didn't you?"

"Confound him, why doesn't he let my affairs alone?" thought the lordly John.

Priestley detected the chill in his companion's manner. "Never mind, old man. I was only joking. You can take all the girls in New York to dinner if you want to, and not hurt my feelings."

John thought of the hostile look that the Great Man had given Priestley on the afternoon of his first visit to the Norton home and for the first time it occurred to him that there might be a reason for Priestley's apparent relief of manner. Priestley ran on with inconsequential chatter that might have concealed either a very deep purpose or the lack of any at all. His usually pale face was slightly flushed and John wondered if he had dined quite wisely. They had almost reached his street when another chance phrase of Priestley's caught his ear. "Old Norton is up to another game, I'll bet a thousand dollars."

"Why do you think so?" John almost stopped in his sudden rush of interest.

"Oh, I can tell." Priestley's eyes were fixed on the glittering lines of light stretching ahead,

broken by a more brilliant cluster at the Plaza, where Sherman sat his charger, and then trailing out in twinkling perspective along the park. "Did you ever see anything like it?" He waved his stick broadly at the lines of lights. "It's the only city in the world, Christopher. All the rest of them — London, Paris, Berlin — are only country villages compared with it. Vienna does pretty well in the season, but the season in Manhattan is twelve months long, and every month is a history of the world in epitome."

John was impatient at the digression. He had no wish to listen to a panegyric on the streets of New York.

"How can you tell?"

"Tell what?" Was the other's indifference real or feigned? "Oh, tell when Norton is about to insert some poor cat's-paw carefully into the fire and rake out a few well-roasted chestnuts? By the way he treats me. Usually he acts as though I were the dust under his feet — or in his eye. He loves me like an only brother when the will is being read; that is, except when he is about to touch off an especially fine set piece of financial fireworks. Then he unlimbers a few smiles and may even condescend to joke with me occasionally. This afternoon he caught me at the house and actually asked me to stay to dinner. It rattled me so that I declined before I knew what I was saying. Anyhow it's always a good plan to go home while the sun's shining.

"Oh, there's something doing, right enough, and if I know the difference between a grunt and an invitation to dinner it's well on the uphill side of big. Somebody will be wondering when the train passed his station before it's over. Norton can make a man rich with a word, but he's awfully careful with his vocabulary. There's only one thing worse than being against him and that's being with him when he decides to lighten ship. Do you turn off here? Well, good night. Glad I saw you."

John was beginning to think that wonderment was the natural state of his mind. Events seemed always to be at the antipodes of expectation. Two days before he had been offered the world for a plaything. To-night Walcott had suggested that it might be a return ball with H. Anisty Norton holding the other end of the string, and Priestley had vaguely hinted at the possibility of dynamite. Who was right? And what did Priestley mean anyway? Had his chatter a serious purpose behind it? John wondered all the way home and when he fell asleep he was still wondering. But his last half-waking thought was of a mass of brown hair and a pair of eyes like deep pools that alternately gleamed in the sunlight and darkened and deepened in the shadow — altogether a curious state of mind for a budding financier and a semi-fiancé.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CAT COMES OUT OF THE BAG

"MAN is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward, Wilkins," was the remark with which John greeted the servitor of the unimpeachable taste in things sartorial when that worthy appeared in his master's bedroom the morning after the dinner with the Walcotts and the walk with Priestley.

"Beg pardon, sir? Yes, sir," replied the servitor aforesaid.

"Wilkins."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know what trouble is?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I've been married, sir."

"Have you? Then you have two attributes that I didn't credit you with — a wife and a sense of humor."

"But I haven't no wife any more, sir."

"Oh, is that so? I'm very sorry to hear that."

"Not at all, sir. She ran away with a barber. It was a great relief, I assure you, sir."

"Oh, then the barber saved you from a close shave."

"No, sir. He wasn't my barber, sir."

John took refuge in laughter. "Wilkins, I

take it all back. You have neither of the attributes I endowed you with just now. The barber must have taken both of them."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. Will you have your bath now, Mr. Christopher?"

"A good idea. Perhaps it will wash my cares away. A bath is always in order, Wilkins."

"This one is, sir. I've seen to that, sir."

John vaninshed into the bathroom from which there floated back presently a great sound of splashing and a piercing whistle. When he emerged ten minutes later, pink-faced and smiling, Wilkins was ready for him with razor and lather-brush.

"Wilkins," John inquired as he settled back in a great easy chair and committed his face to his valet's hands and razor, "did you ever stick your head into a lion's mouth?"

Wilkins looked as shocked as his habitual air of gravity would permit. "Dear me, no, sir. I never worked in a menagerie in my life, sir."

"No? No, I suppose you never did. A great many people do though, you know."

"Yes, sir. My wife's cousin was a lion-tamer, sir, and was accustomed to put her head in the lion's mouth quite often, sir."

"Indeed!"

"Oh, yes, sir. One day the lion shut his jaws together and the poor young lady was frightfully bitten. She was a lovely young lady, too, sir. They did say that the lion was only in play, or

sneezed, or something like that, but it was all one to my wife's cousin."

"Yes, I suppose so. It must have been very sad. Lions are bad to fool with. I'm going to stick my head into one's mouth to-day, Wilkins. Wow! Look out, man!"

"Beg pardon, sir. It's only a little cut, sir. A little alum. There. You said, sir—?"

"That I was going to stick my head in a lion's mouth this very day."

"I hope you'll pardon me if I overstep, sir, but really I'm quite overcome. If I may be so bold, sir, is it a bet or — or —"

"No, it isn't a bet, Wilkins. I only want to see if the lion has swallowed a steel mill. I'm told that he has them for breakfast very often."

Wilkins was speechless. He could only stare helplessly and strop his razor unceasingly.

"Come, come, Wilkins. Get on with your barbering. You'll wear the razor out on the strop at that rate. And be sure you don't leave any whiskers to tickle the lion's mouth. You wouldn't want to be an accessory before the fact, would you?"

"No, sir. Oh, no, sir." And Wilkins applied himself to his master's face with redoubled care. As John dressed leisurely Wilkins hovered about him with more than his usual solicitude, eyeing him from time to time with almost respectful affection. John saw it and was not quite as amused at the result of his joke as he might have been.

He drank his coffee and munched his rolls under the same solicitous eye.

"Now my coat, Wilkins. Don't look so glum, man. It's not a real lion, you know, and I'm not going to stick my real head between his real jaws. Heaven knows, I'd almost as soon do it, though. Cheer up, the worst is yet to come."

"Yes, sir. It usually is, sir."

"What? Have you found that out, too? But your trouble ran away with a barber. Mine seems more likely to run away with me. Good-by, Wilkins."

"Good-by, sir. Good luck."

"By George, Wilkins is the first human being to wish me good luck since I came to this town," thought John as he waited on the curb for a cab. "I'll not forget that. I may not be a hero to my valet, but I'll see that Wilkins has a better time in future than he would if he were valet to a hero. I had him thinking me a kind of a hero with that talk about a lion's jaws, though — or a fool. The two things aren't so very different after all. I'll know which I am in about an hour from now, a fool for my pains or a hero for my pain."

He climbed into his cab.

Great financiers keep more regular hours than the idle young men whose money they care for, and H. Anisty Norton had been at his great glass-topped desk a good hour when John Christopher's card was brought in by the soft-footed clerk.

"Tell him to come in. Good morning, Mr.

Christopher." He gave the young man his hand without rising. "What can I do for you?"

"I hope you'll pardon me for breaking in on your time this way," John began hesitatingly.

"Not at all. Not at all. It's the busy men who can spare the most time. Idle men never have time for anything. What is it?"

"I hardly know how to put it. You see I've been thinking over what you said the other day—"

"Not weakening, are you?" The Great Man's tone was perceptibly harder.

"No, just thinking and wondering if you couldn't give me a few more details."

The Great Man leaned back and thrust his thumbs in the armholes of his vest. "I don't know about that, my boy. The details haven't been fully worked out yet. These things take time, you know. Of course, I'll be only too glad to tell you anything I know. Perhaps you'd better ask me the questions that are troubling you."

"Thank you. I don't want to bother you," John's tone was apologetic, "and my questions will probably seem foolish to you."

"All the easier to dispose of them, then. Foolish questions never worry me long. Fire ahead."

"You said that all the mills in the new combination are to be put on a better footing."

"Yes."

"Do you mind telling me just what that means as applied to the Christopher Mills?"

The Great Man swung back and forth in his

chair and tapped on the glass-topped desk with a pencil. John waited. "Well, it's a little hard to say. We haven't quite got to that yet. The mills will be improved, but, of course, I can't quite say yet what the precise nature of the change will be. New machinery will be put in doubtless, and more improved processes adopted. Such matters are out of my line. You'd better see Marvin or Endleton about that. I'm only a banker." He smiled in deprecatory fashion.

"It isn't that kind of details that I want. In fact, I don't quite know what I do want. What I'm really after is some information about the position my mills will occupy in the proposed combination."

"I can't tell you that, Mr. Christopher." The financier was becoming a little impatient with this young man who confessed his ignorance of his wants, but still persisted in his efforts to voice them.

John remembered Walcott's words: "Keep at him till he tells you." The granite face before him did not encourage further questions, but he persisted. "Will my mills continue to run as they are to-day, with the exception of the improvements?"

"Who's been talking to you?" It was an explosion rather than a question.

John cowered but held his ground. "No one in particular. It's partly my own idea and partly —"

"Partly whose?" Another explosion. This one was delivered standing.

"Well, Mr. Walcott's. He had dinner with me last night and he —"

"Walcott? I might have guessed it. Didn't I tell you to leave Walcott alone? Didn't I say he was out of date? And yet you come here and quote him to me! Well, which do you believe, Walcott or me?"

"Neither one."

"What!" Explosion number three.

"Pardon me, Mr. Norton. I didn't mean it that way. But it isn't a question of believing or disbelieving anyone. All I want to know is what is to become of my mills."

"Oh, damn your mills! Is all my morning to be taken up explaining my business to a young fool who doesn't know his own?" John was on his feet too, and backing toward the door. Evidently Walcott's advice to "get him hot if necessary" was being followed to the letter. The Great Man tramped to the window and back to the desk. "Now you listen to me. I've stood for more questions from you this morning than any other man has dared to ask me in the last twenty-five years." His rage rose with his words, and he tramped to the window and back again. "Either you come into this deal or you stay out. You can do as you damn please. But if you come in, you come clear in. There'll be no putting one hand in the till of the combination and keeping the other on the

Christopher Mills. The directors of the new company will run it as they see fit. If you're a director, you'll have just one vote, no more and no less. If we want to double the capacity of your mills, we'll do it, and if we want to shut them down, we'll do it. They'll be ours, not yours. Is that clear?"

The Great Man's face was purple with rage, but John's was pale. The young man's voice was steady, though, and only the whiteness of his face and the white line across the knuckles that gripped a chair-back showed the strain of his grip upon himself.

"And what if I don't come in?" he asked calmly.

"If you don't come in you'll last about six months, you and your mills. Do you think any two-for-a-cent mill run by a conceited young idiot and a doddering old imbecile can stand up against the men who are in this? Try it! Try it!" He brought his fist down on the glass-topped desk with a blow that sent a geyser spouting from the inkstand. John watched the black pool spread slowly over the polished glass, while the Great Man raged on, now ungovernably.

"I'll tell you something more. The Christopher Mills are done, whether you come in or not. They're doomed. Within six months after the new company is formed your furnaces will be cold and your rolls will be idle. It was the price demanded and we had to have the Dedham works.

We don't have to have yours, but we were willing to let you down easy. Stop your foolishness and you can come in yet. It's the last call. Even if we decide to keep your mills going, Walcott must get out. Marvin hates him, and what Marvin says goes. Come in and forget Walcott and you can live comfortably the rest of your life, marry whom you want to, live where and how you like; stay out, and we'll smash you like an egg-shell and bury the pieces. Now what have you to say?"

"Just this!" John's jaws were set and his words came jerkily. "I may be a fool, but I'm not a pup. Mr. Walcott has served my father and me all his life and I won't have a hand in chucking him overboard now. You may break us, but you'll know there's been a fight. I'm not coming in. Good morning, Mr. Norton."

"Go to the devil!"

The clerks in the outer office looked up curiously as the white-faced young man passed them on the way out. Sounds of the conflict had penetrated to their ears and their master's parting salutation had rung through the room like a shout. John's head was high, but his heart was in the neighborhood of his shoes as he strode down the stairs and climbed into the waiting cab.

From Wall Street to Twenty-third is five miles and Broadway in the middle of the day is not a good place for running away from the blues. For the first mile John rode in an azure haze. On every side he saw ruin. He had more than kept

his joking threat to Wilkins to thrust his head into the lion's mouth and as far as any power of coherent thought was concerned he might as well have left it there. The city was in its normal condition, but to John it was a city of ruins, a modern Carthage and he another Marius sitting alone in the middle of the wreck.

Nothing is so complete, so cataclysmal, as the disasters of youth. Age is harder or it cares less. The young believe with all their minds, hope with all their souls, and failure comes as an assassin's stab from the gods, sudden, sharp, and fatal. The sun goes black, the sea is turned to blood, the earth spins backward, and the stars rain down in angry showers. There are no degrees of failure, just as no shadow is looked for to dim the brightness of anticipated success. Fortunately, youth has few chances to fail greatly.

John was an exception. He had flown high on the wings of his dreams and when he crashed to earth it was some time before he could discern anything but the wreckage around him. As his cab jogged wearisomely uptown he progressed slowly from complete numbness through all the stages of returning consciousness to comparative sanity. A traffic block at Chambers Street with a sweating, swearing policeman in the middle of it inspired him with murderous impulses against all representatives of law and order. He would have liked to kill an officer or two or turn anarchist. At Canal Street he contemplated suicide. At Eighth Street

the cabby poked his face down to the trap in the roof and asked: "Where to, sir?"

"To the devil," said John. "That's where I was told to go."

The cabby grinned vaguely. He had driven many young men who were traveling that route, but they were less frank as to the destination. Cabby was more sure of the rate of fare to some of the half-way houses along the road.

"Wait a minute," said John. "On second thought, I won't go there — yet. Drive to the park."

The trap dropped with a click and the horse jogged on. As they swung around Union Square the statuary libel on the Great Emancipator caught his eye and his thought flashed back to Schuyler and the good gray president who had been a friend of Lincoln. He read the inscription on the pedestal: "With malice toward none, with charity for all."

"That was going some," he said to himself with grim appreciation of the slang. "Wonder if there weren't a few mental reservations in that speech."

Then he thought of dad and the memory cleared his vision. "Dad will stand by me — dad and maybe Wilkins. That makes two to start with. Bigger things have begun with less backing, but I'd feel better with more of a crowd behind me. Good-by, Abraham." He waved his hand back at the statue. "Wish me luck. I don't

know what I'm going to do, but I need all the luck there is."

At Twenty-third Street another traffic jam stopped them, but this time John had progressed so far toward complete sanity that he was willing to let the policeman live on. He even hummed a little tune and leaned forward to look at the swelling buds on the trees in Madison Square Park.

"Wait for me, boys," he murmured gayly to the slouching figures on the park benches. "Thank God, there's always the bread-line and the parks. That reminds me." He looked at his watch and poked open the trap-door to catch a glimpse of the cabby's leathern face silhouetted against the clear sky. "Drive me to Harvey's, cabby. I've discovered that I'm hungry."

"First it's the devil and then it's Harvey's," said the personage on the driver's seat as he slapped the lines along his horse's shaggy back. "They have queer tastes, but it's all the same to Maggy."

Food has saved the lives of more than the merely starving. Many a man who has contemplated murder or suicide or entertained thoughts of arson fifteen minutes before the dinner bell, has regarded his fellow-man with benevolent affection half an hour afterwards. Gloomy thoughts fly before the flourish of a menu card as evil spirits before the sign of the cross.

John ate, and as he ate he thought. His situation was bad no doubt, but what of that? The

harder the struggle, the greater the glory. Beyond the Alps lies Italy! Up, Guards and at them! Victory or Westminster Abbey! *De l'-audace, encore de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace!* He sipped his coffee and meditated. The clouds were dark, but he was beginning to suspect a silver lining, perhaps even a gold one, if he played his cards shrewdly. The mills must be saved and Walcott should not be sacrificed. He was conscious of a very distinct feeling of pride over this resolution. He would bare his own breast to the wintry winds of H. Anisty Norton's anger, but the man who had stood behind the guns at Doncaster so many years should not feel them.

Some day when Walcott should know of his young master's undaunted gallantry in the face of danger — not from that young master's lips, of course — he would be properly grateful. Perhaps even his daughter would thank him in her heart, although that would be nothing to John, of course. For he had found a way out of the difficulty and that way was Alice. He would marry Alice, not that that would be a sacrifice, for he repeatedly assured himself that there was nothing else in the world that he desired so much. The Great Man might be hard, but he could not refuse the husband of his only daughter. Two hours earlier John would not have been so sure, but Harvey's is a good six miles from Wall Street, and fear, like other forces, varies directly as the mass and inversely as the square of the distance —

of and from the thing feared. The schoolboy is keenly contemptuous of the ferule when the turn in the road shuts the schoolhouse from sight.

So John smoked and meditated. Then he consulted his watch. Two o'clock. Why not have it over this very afternoon? Charity for all, and the modern reading of *charis* is love. Alice's grandmother wanted it, he thought, her father would not have been averse the day before, he suspected, Alice herself was open to argument, he hoped, and he was mad with love, he knew. But was not two o'clock a trifle early, even for a devoted lover? A turn to the park and back and a little loitering in the club would remedy that. Then, hey, for the supreme effort, bless you, my children, and the chimes of Grace Church to echo the Benediction.

But what was that? He could have sworn he heard his own name — Was someone speaking to him? He looked around. No one was near. He heard the voices again, this time more distinctly. They came from the other side of a screen that stood, hitherto unnoticed, close at his elbow. In his absorption he had not known that it was not the wall. He had seen no one pass behind it. Evidently the owners of the voices had been there throughout his luncheon. Who could they be and why should they be speaking of him? He listened without thought of the fate that the proverb accords to eavesdroppers.

"It's no use, Carty." The voice — was it

Alice's? It was strangely like. "Papa and grandmama are set upon it, and I can't fight both of them."

"Don't fight." A man's voice this time, deep, pleading, urgent, evidently Carter Priestley's. "Don't fight," he repeated. "Run away — with me."

"Oh, Carty, I wouldn't dare. They'd never forgive me."

"Try it. It's worth the trying. Why should you be made miserable all the rest of your life? You are the one who has most at stake. Why let them live your life for you?"

"If I only dared." The tone was less firm, suspiciously suggestive of a stretching out of the hand for the forbidden fruit.

"Dare then, and have it over with. You love me, don't you?"

"You know I do." The words were low and the listener strained his ears shamelessly to catch them. Was this Alice, the girl he loved, the way out of all his difficulties, the guide to happiness and peace? Conviction grew as he listened.

"It isn't that," the girl's voice went on. "It isn't that I have any doubt of my own feelings. You know what they are, but dare I do it? I shall be a helpless burden to you, Carty. And you know you haven't so awfully much money, now, have you?"

"Not much, but enough." The man's tone was instinct with the assurance of victory. The

listener on the other side of the screen felt again the sickening sensation of defeat. "I haven't any steel mills that I know of, and I shouldn't know what to do with them if I had them."

"Neither does Mr. Christopher." The girl delivered the thrust without suspecting that it went home through the thin screen.

He could bear no more. This then was the end to all his hopes. Fate had dealt him his last hand and there were no trumps in it. He rose and strode around the screen to confront the guilty pair. The girl sprang up with a little cry. "Mr. Christopher! You?"

Priestley sat still, anger dawning in his pale face. "So! You've been listening!" he said.

"Yes, I've been listening." John's voice was as calm as when he had faced the girl's father in the morning and heard the death warrant of the Christopher Mills. "It's a lucky thing for you I did — and for me too. I've been a fool, Miss Norton. I may be one still, but I'm not a blind fool any longer. I appreciate your unwillingness to marry one man while you're in love with another." His voice shook a little, but he kept tight hold of his dignity. "Believe me, I could never be a party to so immoral a proceeding. I may not know what to do with my steel mills, but I do know what to do with myself under the circumstances. I congratulate you both. Priestley, you may care to know that the process of lightening ship that you spoke of last night has begun already.

I'm the first man over the rail. I bid you good afternoon."

He turned on his heel and was gone.

The girl stared at her lover with wide eyes, her cheeks pale, her lips parted.

"Oh, that was awful! What did he mean?"

Priestley answered slowly. "I don't know. I wish I did. Poor devil! I'm sorry for him, after all."

"Go after him. Bring him back!" the girl urged. "Don't let him leave like this. I'm afraid. Go!"

But John had left the restaurant, passing close by the corner where he had sat with Eve Walcott and her father the night before, as he went out.

CHAPTER XVIII

INTO THE DARKNESS

WHEN John Christopher walked out of Harvey's that spring afternoon he disappeared as completely as though he had dropped into the Hudson River. Alice Norton and Carter Priestley were the last among his friends to set eyes on him and to that pair the memory of his stricken face was not a pleasant one, guiltless as they felt themselves to be. Priestley could not well seek John, even if he had so wished, and Alice knew that her grandmother's house would be the last place that he would turn to under the circumstances. So it was natural that neither of them should know anything of his disappearance, since both expected it as far as they were concerned. Mrs. Burroughs made one or two listless inquiries into the reason for John's avoidance of her house, and got little satisfaction from her granddaughter.

Of other friends who would be likely to take note of a two- or three-day absence from his accustomed haunts John had none. Acquaintances at the club he had, and these would have been moved to the same show of languid interest by his reappearance after a week in the Adirondacks or a year in the interior of China. Not even a bub-

ble rose to the surface of the turgid, defiled current, into which he had apparently sunk, to mark his disappearance.

It was Wilkins, the faithful valet, he of the unimpeachable taste in clothes, the man who had known the burden of sorrow in his time until the barber eased it from his shoulders, who brought the news to Priestley. An attendant came to that gentleman lounging idly in the club smoking room two days after the luncheon at Harvey's, with word that Mr. Christopher's valet would have speech with him.

Wilkins stood stiffly erect just inside the main door. His attire was as subdued and immaculate as ever, but his clean-shaven face was woe-begone and anxious.

"Well, Wilkins," drawled Priestley.

"Oh, Mr. Priestley, it's Mr. Christopher."

"Mr. Christopher!" echoed Priestley, swift fear clutching at his heart. "What about Mr. Christopher?"

"That's just it, sir. I don't know. That's why I've come to you, you having got me the place and me being in a way responsible to you, sir, as you might say, and me knowing that you and him was such friends, if I might —"

Priestley cut short the rambling, lachrymose recital. "Come to the point, man! What do you mean? What's it all about?"

"He's gone, sir, and that's the truth." Wilkins regained some of his old-time habit of brev-

ity under the stress of Priestley's sharp questioning.

"Gone," again echoed the astonished Priestley, chill fear creeping along his tightening nerves. "You don't mean he's—" He stopped. His tongue could not frame the question.

"He's gone, sir," Wilkins repeated with sad monotony. "Disappeared. Dropped clean out of sight."

"Since when?"

"Day before yesterday, sir."

Day before yesterday! The day of the fatal luncheon! Priestley's fear had so much foundation at least.

"Tell me all you know," he commanded, his curt tone bearing little trace of his usual languid drawl.

"And that's little enough, sir, saving your presence."

"Never mind my presence. Cut along. You say you saw Mr. Christopher last, day before yesterday. What time of the day?"

"In the morning, sir."

"Did he say anything about going away?"

"Not a word, although he did say he was going to stick his head in a lion's mouth. I remember that."

"What did he mean?"

"I don't know that, sir. Some of his jokes, I thought then, though he did seem a bit nervous and anxious-like."

"Tell me all you know."

"Well, sir, he had his bath, which I drew with these hands." Wilkins exhibited the hands in question as proof that he spoke the truth. Priestley grunted his impatience. "Then he dressed and he asked me if I had ever stuck my head in a lion's mouth, and I said no, but I once knew a lady, a cousin of my wife's, who —"

"Oh, get down to cases. Never mind your wife's cousin, or your wife either."

"Very well, sir. Thank you, sir. I won't. Well, then he had breakfast and laughed and joked with me all the time he was eating, and — and — that's all."

"All? Are you sure? When did he leave his rooms?"

"Oh, at once, sir. As soon as he had had his breakfast, he had me call a cab and he went away, and that's all I know." The faithful Wilkins bowed his head as Oriental vassal might have bared his neck to the bowstring.

"You called a cab! Did you hear him tell the cabman where to drive?"

"I didn't hear the number, sir, but it was somewhere in Wall Street."

"Wall Street! By Jove, I wonder!" Priestley brushed his foot absently back and forth over the tiled floor. "Why would he go there? Could old Norton have told him anything?"

He remembered John's face as he had seen it last. Could slighted love and wounded vanity

have painted that look there? He knew better. Christopher was too sensible a fellow at heart to let his spirit be slain outright by such weapons. No, despair, desperation, were in his face, the look of a man who feels the chasm behind him, beneath whose feet the solid ground is crumbling. If his wounds were only slight abrasions of the affections, they would soon heal. Meanwhile a little solitude would be good for him, as well as appreciated by his friends. If they were the deeper thrusts which Priestley feared but did not understand, anything might happen.

He turned to Wilkins. "Have you been anywhere else? No? Good. Listen. You have done right to come to me. Go back at once to Mr. Christopher's rooms and stay there till you hear from me. If Mr. Christopher returns or any message comes from — or — about him, send word to me at the club here. And don't worry, Wilkins," he laid his hand on the valet's shoulder. "Mr. Christopher will turn up in a day or two, as right as rain, and laugh at your fears."

"Thank you, Mr. Priestley. I hope so, I'm sure, sir. I shall do as you say."

Priestley turned back into the smoking room, but his cigar had lost its flavor: "Poor devil," he muttered. "What the deuce has he done? And what the very deuce am I to do?" He pondered, turning his unlighted cigar round and round between his fingers.

Suppose the young idiot had really done some-

thing desperate? Nonsense! And why nonsense? Other men had chosen the short road with the sharp turning before now. But John Christopher, with his boy's spirit and the man's capacity for gravity? Not he. What was he to do? This question brought Priestley face to face with another question that he had seen lurking in the background of his reflections for some minutes but would not recognize, as one turns his eyes steadfastly away from a casual acquaintance whom he knows he must sooner or later acknowledge but yet postpones the greeting from pure shamefacedness.

That question was — Alice. Should he tell her? He knew the motto of the American lover and husband: Spare the woman. But why spare her to her own eventual hurt? If young Christopher had indeed done what Priestley feared — and feared to name — she must know it at last, and in a way that would only cloud her happiness. Now, in the midst of the uncertainty, knowledge of the tale that Wilkins had brought might prove an antitoxin to the greater pain that the future might hold. It was their love — in part at least — that had driven Christopher off the highroad. That love should be the torch to light the way of the searchers. So he reasoned with himself and so he decided.

The confidence in John's early and safe return that Priestley had expressed to Wilkins was not so apparent in Priestley's voice and manner when

he faced Alice Norton half an hour later in her grandmother's drawing room.

"Christopher's gone," was the bombshell he flung at that young lady's ears. "He's cleared out — disappeared." He dropped into a chair limply.

"Oh, what do you mean? What has he done? How do you know?" The girl's voice shook, the color fled from her cheeks, her hand trembled as she laid it on Priestley's arm. "Tell me what you mean."

"I don't know myself. Wilkins came to me at the club just now, scared blue, and appealed to me to find his master. He knows even less than — than I do, but he's prepared to think almost anything."

"When did — did it happen?"

"Day before yesterday."

"The day of the — the —"

"The day Christopher took luncheon with us?" grimly. "Yes, Wilkins has not seen his master since he left his rooms that morning. He says he took a cab for some number on Wall Street."

"Wall Street? Can he have gone to papa's office?"

"That's what I'm wondering. Tell me, Alice, do you know anything of your father's relations with Christopher? In a general way, I mean. Any clew, however slight, might help us now, if he's really disappeared. Suppose he has? Suppose he has deliberately dropped out of sight —

not that way," in answer to the girl's quick catching of her breath and the look of horror that crossed her face. "I don't think we need fear that. But why has he gone? Could he have run away because of — of what he overheard in the restaurant?"

The girl's answer came slowly, as from one trying to puzzle a way out of a darkened maze. "I don't — think so. He might have gone away for a time, but not this way. Not so abruptly, I mean, without a word to his servant or to grandmother, or anybody. Men don't suddenly efface themselves from the world because a girl says no, Carty; at least, normal men don't, and John Christopher was normal. If that had been all, wouldn't his pride have held him up?"

"I think so. That's why I asked about your father."

"I don't know anything of papa's plans, Carty. He tells me nothing, and I ask nothing. Often I hardly see him for days at a time. We've scarcely spoken a dozen words for a week. It's apt to be that way when he's busy about some new scheme."

"Then there may be a new scheme on foot now?" The man asked the question quickly, almost eagerly.

"Yes, it's quite possible, though I've heard nothing. Why?"

"I scarcely know. There are so many things to consider. His valet says Christopher took a

cab for Wall Street. Your father's office is on Wall Street. Who else does Christopher know there? Do you see? We could find the sum if we knew all the figures."

"Then you think it was not altogether our — our — what he overheard us say that sent him away?"

"I don't know. God knows, I hope not! Alice," he turned to the girl roughly, "unless we find this man there will be a curse on our love. We must find him! If your father can help us, he must tell us what he knows."

His pale face was flushed. There was a light in his eye and an energy in his bearing that Alice had never seen there before and which she yet admired. But she shook her head slowly. "Don't expect too much of papa, Carty. He's my father and I love him, but I know him too. Sometimes I am afraid of him."

She laid her hand appealingly on her lover's arm. He had never known her so timid, so femininely weak and fearful. "If anyone stood between papa and his goal, I think he would trample him underfoot. Sometimes I think he would sacrifice me if I were in the way."

The man took her into his arms, half blessing John in his heart that his disappearance had brought them so close together.

"Then we must play it alone, sweetheart." He shook her gently. "Whatever happens, you shall not be sacrificed. Do you understand that?

You belong to me now. We stand or fall together."

She clung to him closely, finding relief in his caresses from the haunting fear that there was indeed a curse on their love. Presently she slipped from his arms. "But, how? How? We must find him, for our own sakes as well as his own, but how?"

Priestley stood with bent head and wrinkled forehead. "How? That's a big question. Let me think."

The girl eyed him anxiously as he studied the pattern of the rug.

"Could he have gone back to Doncaster?" she asked.

"Hardly," the man shook his head. "A telegram will soon settle that one way or the other, at any rate.

"No, we must begin at the restaurant and trace him from there if we can. He may have been heard from at the club, but that's unlikely too. He had not had time to make close friends there. I knew him as well as anyone. I will try the hotels. He may have hidden himself away there. We can hire a detective if everything else fails, though the average detective can't see anything smaller than the Flatiron Building. Who's that?"

It was a ring at the doorbell. A footman padded softly through the hall. They heard the door open and a man's voice ask for Mrs. Burroughs.

"Who shall I say?" they heard the footman question.

"Tell her 'Mr. Dunham,'" the man's voice answered.

Alice caught at her lover with a hysterical little laugh. "It's his adopted father — the man he lived with," she said.

"Will you wait here," the servant said, "till I see if Mrs. Burroughs is in?"

The breathless pair in the drawing room heard the man move a step away from the door as it closed and then there was silence. The girl still clung to her lover who braced himself as though to meet a physical onset.

"We must tell him," he whispered.

"Oh, Carty, must we? Can he help us?" she whispered in return.

"Probably not. Probably he'll hinder, but we must tell him anyway. It's his right, and we couldn't keep it from him if we tried."

"And grandmother?"

"She, too." The man's lips set in a straight line. "I'm afraid the fat's in the fire as far as any secrecy is concerned, but if it is we'll have to let it burn."

They heard Mrs. Burroughs come softly but quickly down the stairs and saw her pass the opening between the hangings in the doorway. "Mr. Dunham," she said. "This is an unexpected pleasure. I have heard Mr. Christopher speak —"

"That is just why I have come to you, madam." The man's voice was hard, tense. "Where is he?"

"Where is he?" Mrs. Burroughs echoed the question wonderingly. "I don't understand."

"Neither do I. So I have come to you for light."

"Come in here, Mr. Dunham." Mrs. Burroughs drew aside the hangings at the door. "Why, Alice, I didn't know you were here. Good morning, Mr. Priestley." The pair stood speechless till Priestley broke the spell.

"Mr. Dunham and I have come on the same errand, Mrs. Burroughs." He bowed to the elder man. "My name is Priestley, Mr. Dunham."

Mrs. Burroughs looked from Priestley to her granddaughter and then to Dunham.

"What errand? And why this mystery? Can't you speak, some of you? Where is John Christopher, and why have you come to me, Mr. Dunham?" She flung the questions from her in a breath. Priestley began to speak, but Dunham interrupted him. "I have just come from my — from Mr. Christopher's rooms, Mrs. Burroughs. He is not there, and his servant tells me that he has not been there since the day before yesterday. He does not know where his master is, and talked incoherently of all sorts of vague possibilities. I knew of your friendship for John and learned your address from his servant. So I have come to you. Where is he?"

"How should I know? I have not seen him for nearly a week. He does not report his comings and goings to me."

Priestley interrupted with a "Permit me, Mrs. Burroughs." Then he told the story he had already brought to Alice, of Wilkins's appearance, his distress over his master's disappearance, minimizing his own fears and bearing down hard on the confidence he did not feel.

Dunham's eyes were upon him throughout and at the end he asked the single question, "Why should John Christopher run away? Tell me that." Fear, anxiety, distress, were in his tone, but the dominating note was belief in his boy's worthiness and ability to stand his ground before all the powers of heaven and earth.

This was the question Priestley feared and knew he must meet. For answer he pointed to Alice and then to himself. "I'm afraid, sir, that we were the reason — partly at least."

"You!" Mrs. Burroughs caught up the cry. "Are you all crazy, or am I? John Christopher disappeared, you and Alice to blame, and Mr. Dunham here to find him!" She turned to the elder man. "Can you unravel this tangle, Mr. Dunham? Did you come all the way from Illinois to find John Christopher?"

"I came to see him, not to search for him," the man said curtly. "My coming was unexpected and unannounced except by wire. My telegram lies on John's table along with the accumulation

of three days' mail. I came expecting a welcome, not a tragedy."

Alice caught up the word. "Not a tragedy, Mr. Dunham! I don't believe it. I won't believe it — not yet!"

Mrs. Burroughs sank into a chair with a gasp. "Is there one sensible person among you? Why do you stand here talking like a pack of gabbling geese? John Christopher has gone away and his thick-headed servant is worried, it seems. What of that? It isn't the first time that young men have kept out of sight for two or three days, I fancy, nor yet the first time thick-headed servants have been worried. Lucky it's only a servant and not a wife."

The word started a new train of thought in the old lady's mind and her questions veered around to Priestley. "What did you and Alice have to do with it? How have you driven him away?" Suspicion was in the sudden look she darted at the pair.

There was no help for it. Love and murder will out. Priestley plunged into his confession.

"In the first place, Mrs. Burroughs, I am in love with Alice, and mean to marry her." The old lady raised her hands speechlessly. "I know that her father wanted her to marry Christopher, and I was determined to prevent it, by hook or by crook. Christopher happened to overhear us talking in the restaurant day before yesterday."

Mrs. Burroughs favored Alice with a hard look:

"Hereafter, young lady, you lunch at home. Go on, Mr. Priestley."

"Christopher overheard us, as I say, walked in upon us, congratulated us, and walked out again. That's all there is to tell. Neither of us has seen him since, nor, apparently, have any of his friends."

For the moment thought of the main issue was wiped from Mrs. Burroughs's mind by Priestley's declaration of his intentions toward her granddaughter. Her spirit stirred at touch of something tangible to contemplate, to combat.

"So you intend to marry my granddaughter, Mr. Priestley. It's news to me, I must say. Have you, either of you, considered that her father or I might possibly have something to say about that? Have you thought of that?" Her voice rose shrilly and she leaned forward in her chair.

Dunham saved Priestley from the embarrassment of attempting an answer to this very pertinent question.

"This is all very well, Mrs. Burroughs, but it does not help me find my boy. The reason for his disappearance is nothing to me, save that it assures me that he has taken his good name with him untarnished. You will pardon me if I say that your granddaughter may marry whom and when she likes as far as I am concerned, but I — I," his voice thrilled to a note of deeper feeling, "I want my boy. Where is he?"

Alice moved toward him involuntarily, pity and

sympathy in her look and gesture. Feeling herself guiltless in the main, she had room for regret that she had not had the courage to answer Christopher definitely when he had first spoken. So might this snarl of circumstance, this tangle of dark mystery, have been averted.

Dunham's gaze that he turned to her was sorrowful but determined. The man's clothes, his rough hands, his sunburned face, were eloquent of his occupation, but in voice and manner, bearing and gesture, he was her equal, Priestley's, her father's, anyone's. He turned his eyes from the girl to the woman. The latter sat helpless, limp. Age spoke in every lax line of her figure. Nothing remained of the alert youthfulness that defied the years which had so impressed Christopher. She was a woman of the world, clad in the armor of experience, girt about with assurance that comes from position and power long wielded, but before this plain Illinois farmer she shrank and cowered like any weak old woman. His voice was deep and accusing, but not harsh.

"What have you done with my boy, all of you? I gave him to you. He was mine for twenty years, and I kept him clean and true and honest. Cleanliness and truth and honesty he may have yet — does have, I would stake my life on it. But he's gone. I trained him for his life's race, made him fit. I knew the burdens he would be called upon to bear, and I tried to make his shoulders strong for them. The temptations he would meet

I knew, and I braced his soul for them. I gave him the best I had, worked with him, watched over him, prayed for him, and this is the end."

Mrs. Burroughs huddled down in her chair. She was weeping feebly. Power of protest or denial was not in her. Alice and her lover stood as though fascinated, their eyes on this farmer who spoke as a Jacob lamenting his last born.

"He would have gone back to the mills, I know, if you had let him alone, you and your kind. His father's trust would have been kept; he would not have betrayed the confidence of the living or the dead. But you surrounded him with your gilded web, smeared his clean mind with your cursed sophistries of a gentleman's way of living, tempted him with the bait of a rich and beautiful wife, blinded him with the false brilliancy of your sham world. I sent him out for his battle and you urged him to idle in his tent. I have lived in your world and I know its hollowness, its insincerity, its danger. I could have saved him if I had known his peril in time. I feared it and I came, but I came too late. You who know urged him on to pluck the fruit that could be only ashes at the best and poison at the worst. Where is he? Give him back to me!"

His voice broke and he turned blindly to the door. Alice was at his side. He saw her through a mist of tears.

"You I don't blame so much, my dear," he said brokenly. "You are a victim, too, unless you

have found your way out. But for her — for your grandmother," he flung one look at the broken old woman weeping quietly in her chair, "I will leave her to her own thoughts. God knows they can be no more bitter than mine."

Then he was gone and Alice turned back to her lover.

CHAPTER XIX

OUT OF DARKNESS, LIGHT

MANY people, principally women, have commented on strange coincidences and accidental meetings with long absent friends in out-of-the-way corners of crowded cities. There is really nothing remarkable about this fact, however, when one considers that the sons of men follow beaten paths in their metropolitan tangles as surely as do the jungle folk on their migrations for food and water or the savage tribes on the move from hunting field to hunting field. If you would find the man you seek, you have but to learn the line of least resistance in distance, time, or money, from his house to the place where he earns or wastes his daily bread, and take your stand beside it. You will find his daily round only slightly less regular than the swinging of the planets in their orbits. To meet him thus of set purpose is rational and therefore commonplace. To cross his path unknowingly at the proper time and place is accidental — and therefore a thing to wonder at.

It is when a man swings out of his orbit and goes whirling blindly among and across the courses of other human spheres, that finding him becomes

a perplexing problem. His orbit cannot be calculated because he has none. He no longer feels the centripetal pull of love, or duty, or interest which keeps other men to the regular path. The tangential throw of passion, anger, despair, hurls him forth to wander pathless and alone.

Knowing the force of the throw, you may hazard a fair guess at the direction and distance of his flight, but without that knowledge even a guess has less than half a leg to stand on.

All of which is merely another way of saying that when John Christopher was lost he was doubly lost, since none of his friends knew how hard and sudden had been the centrifugal fling that had sent him headlong out of their sight. The death of his hopes Aliceward was one of the terms of the problem, but agreeing in little else, the three parties to the search agreed that that alone could not have created such sudden, complete havoc — would have been rather only a temporary slackening of the inward pull, causing him to revolve for a time in a slightly wider orbit. Each of them, starting from different hypotheses regarding the way of a man with a maid, arrived at substantially the same conclusion, that by no stretch of the imagination could this man's way with this maid be conceived as leading to such an end of possible tragedy for the one and consequent certain sorrow for the other. And further than that they could none of them go, except to echo Dunham's cry, "Now he is lost. Where is he?"

Naturally the burden of the actual search fell on Dunham and Priestley. Alice, sitting at home with her helpless, lachrymose, suddenly senile grandmother, could only conjure up scenes of horror and pray that she might be shielded somehow from the blasting stroke of her father's anger. In the midst of her doubt and terror a faint ray of sardonic humor lighted her mental darkness at the thought that John Christopher's disappearance had reduced her at a stroke to the world-old position of the woman. She, the polished product of the new age, secure in her domination as in her dependency, that strange paradox of modern femininism, a self-reliant woman with a sense of humor, could only sit at home and wait — wait as did her troglodyte ancestress, or her own lineal pioneer grandames, or her humble sisters who cluster dumb or wailing as is their temper, about pit-mouths where the smoke of the sacrifice curls softly up. She even tried to pray a little, haltingly and with shamed face, as of one venturing upon the thin ice of a new language. And it is to be feared that in her prayers there were two words for Priestley to every one for the young man who was lost.

Meanwhile her lover and Dunham groped in the shadows of glaring New York, torn between hopes and fears. Their first try was at the restaurant where Christopher had been seen last. The head waiter knew him. *Mais, non,* Monsieur Chreestopher he had not been seen for two, three, four

days. Who could tell? We dine many people, messieurs, and sometimes we remember and sometimes we do not. All with outspread hands and a shrug of the shoulders that endangered the courteous head waiter's ears.

Casts for Christopher's cabman on that last day promised a little better fortune. No one knew his number or recalled his face. Then they tried the cab stables. Did any of their drivers remember taking a young man to Wall Street and back to Harvey's on such and such a day? After twenty-four hours in which there had been but four hours of sleep for either of them they found their man, and finding him found — nothing.

Sure, he remembered taking a young man to Wall Street, to H. Anisty Norton's office it was. Everyone knew where that redoubtable spider sat at the center of the financial web. He had seemed downcast, half-crazy-like on the way back. He had told the cabman to drive him to the devil at one time, and the cabman permitted a faint grin to trickle past the stem of his pipe at the recollection. Yes, he drove him to Harvey's. That was the end of that trail. The cabman had left him there and had gone cruising down the avenue for other fares. His clearest recollection was of the fat tip he had pocketed. He dwelt on this phase of the incident with considerable relish which was not diminished when a corpulent brother to the Christopher benefaction passed from Priestley's pocket to his own.

Something had been gained there perhaps — perhaps not. To the search party they seemed to have hit upon the missing factor in the problem of Christopher's sudden divergence from proper planetary behavior. The next step was to discover the size and value of the new factor. Here they were beaten back by the waves of the Great Man's still seething anger. Dunham insisted on prosecuting this part of the search alone, having no wish to further complicate the maze which Priestley must tread before he should stand safely and securely by Alice's side. To reach the shrine of the glass-topped desk the old man ran the gauntlet of the outer office, brushing the soft-footed clerk aside and fairly hurling himself through the door.

Five minutes later he hurled out again, pursued by a bellowing roar as Christopher had been. In that five minutes the Great Man had given him clearly to understand that he was neither conducting an information bureau for strangers in New York nor providing first aid for the injured feelings of young fools with more money than brains. Furthermore, if young Christopher had succeeded in losing himself, it was the first successful or creditable undertaking he had engaged in, and his friends should wish him joy of it. That and a reference to the homing qualities of bogus currency, topping off with the devout wish that Christopher and all connected with him might find themselves a good deal further than Wall Street was the sum total of Dunham's catch in the troubled financial

waters. The old man sorrowfully recounted his experience to Priestley.

"Was that all he said?" asked Priestley.

"All, except that he would see John and me, too, in hell, before he would turn a hand over to help me find him."

"If that's true, then the place to look for Christopher is in the old brute's office," was the only comment of the aspirant to the position of son-in-law to the brute aforesaid.

Then they turned to their groping in the shadows again. They combed the hotels from the Battery to the Park. No result. It was a slender hope at best and there is no record of a drowning man being saved by the straw at which he clutches. Men come and men go in the caravansaries of Broadway and only the passing of the great or the impecunious is remarked by the scornful young men who sit at the receipt of room-keys.

At the end of the third day Priestley turned to the older man with a look of tentative inquiry and suggestion.

"That brings us down to the other places," he said.

"What other places?" Dunham asked.

He was showing signs of breaking under the strain. His face was lined with more than age and his eyes were sunken and without hope. Priestley was paler even than usual and there were dark blotches under his eyes. Otherwise he was

unchanged. He hedged a little at Dunham's question.

"There are the gambling rooms," he said. "So far as I know, Christopher never played. He may not know one card from another, but it's a chance. Anything is better than nothing."

His thought was as much of Alice as of Christopher or the old man to whom he spoke. He did not dare go back to her till he had found the boy — or knew beyond question that he could not be found. Dunham nodded dumbly, pathetically. He could suggest nothing, lead no forlorn hopes. He could only follow.

"We'll try Chambers's first," said Priestley with lying briskness. There was no hope in his heart.

Chambers's was entered with little ceremony. A knock at the barred door, a muttered word to the negro doorkeeper, and they were in the sanctuary where drunken fools and sober madmen doled out their souls nightly across the green-clothed tables. Christopher was not there, had not been there, on the word of no less a personage than Mr. Chambers himself, close-lipped, clean-shaven, immaculately dressed, looking as little like a gambler as a shepherd resembles a pirate. Would Mr. Priestley or his friend take a hand in a quiet game or try their luck at the little ball? No? Well, come again, gentlemen. Sorry I can't help you. And the spider turned back to his flies.

"Evidently he hasn't walked into that parlor," commented Priestley as they drove away. "Might better have come here though than have gone to old Norton. You see the cards here, at least."

But Dunham had no heart for cynical badinage or impromptu social studies. They drove on in silence to the next place. Same result. A blank. Then to the next — and still a blank. All through the night they pursued their round until Dunham's head reeled with the sameness and emptiness of their search. One place differed from another only in the glory — or the tawdriness — of the hangings, the taste or crude suggestiveness of the pictures and the statuary, the deference or suspiciousness of attendants and proprietors, the obvious poverty or wealth of those who sat at the tables under the flaring lights. Priestley seemed a directory of the sanctuaries of chance. Where his own knowledge halted, he bridged the gap by low-toned conference with hotel clerks or white-aproned servitors behind mahogany bars, even with shabby individuals who lounged at street corners. Once or twice their driver came to the rescue when all other finger posts of bankruptcy failed them. Back and forth from Twenty-third Street to the Park — and even above and below — they tacked and turned, peering into dazzling temples and sordid dens, touching elbows with opulence and ruin, dragging information from close-locked lips, repelling inquiries from other lips that

drooped and slavered. Like another Dante Dunham followed his silk-hatted Virgil through the nine circles of a hell that seethed with the heat of unholy greed or froze with the cold of despair.

They gave over their search only when a tired dawn put the flaring street lamps to shame. Then they drove wearily back to the rooms where the faithful Wilkins waited, red-eyed and hollow-cheeked for his lost master.

"No, Wilkins. No trace of him yet," was Priestley's answer to the question in the valet's look. Dunham was too far gone in weariness even to speak.

Priestley made a significant gesture in the old man's direction as the latter staggered into Christopher's sitting room and dropped into a chair. "Get him to bed," he whispered as he brushed by Wilkins and walked to the window. "Better turn in and have a little rest, Mr. Dunham," he said over his shoulder. "I'll go on to the club and come back to you in a few hours."

Dunham did not hear him. His chin rested on his breast and he breathed heavily. Priestley measured the older man's impression of the past night's wanderings by his own — and pitied him. Sophisticated from the cradle, superficially hardened as he was, he felt the strain of the unhealthy scenes through which they had passed. True, they had not touched the pitch, but the vile odors of its burning lingered in his nostrils. He longed for the cleansing rush of cold water, for the feel of

clean linen, for fresh air, most of all for the forgetfulness of sleep. His love of cleanliness, rather than his moral sense, had been offended, and he rubbed his unshaven chin with vague resentment of its stubble.

"We can begin again to-morrow," he remarked with a lying cheerfulness.

"To-morrow?" The old man moved uneasily in his chair. "To-morrow!" he repeated as though in doubt of that threatening future. Then he dragged himself forward in his chair. "What shall we find to-morrow? Where can we go? What is left to us?"

Priestley hesitated; then he spoke a single sentence.

"No!" The answer was flung out with a burst of sudden energy. "I would rather find him dead, than living so." His worn, wrinkled hands were outstretched to Priestley. "Must we sink to that? Surely there must be some other chance — the gutter even — the — the," he hung on the word —"even the morgue."

Priestley shook his head. "I have had the police stations and the — the morgue watched," he said pityingly. "We must not give up now. A thousand things may have happened; we must find the one that did happen — and find it soon," his despair whispered in his ear.

The old man sank back in his chair again, limp, utterly weary. Tears trickled down under his closed eyelids. Wilkins stood helplessly behind

him, his eyes on Priestley. The old man spoke again, drearily, half to himself.

"And this is New York," he muttered. "The goal of my boy's hopes — the end of his dreams. Is this the best your city can do for the stranger within her gates, Mr. Priestley? 'You have made my temple a den of thieves,'" his voice dropped to a mumbled monotone. "A den of thieves — a den of tigers — a hell of mocking devils — a desert of inhumanity. Oh, my boy! My boy!" His voice rose again and the worn, clutching hands were outstretched. "Give him back to me! Give him back —" He ceased abruptly and rose to his feet, dashing his hand across his eyes.

"Pardon me, Mr. Priestley." He spoke coldly, steadily. "I am not quite myself. I shall be better for a little rest. You must excuse me."

He took a step toward the bedroom door and staggered as he turned. Priestley strode forward, but it was the faithful Wilkins who caught the old man's arm and supported him across the room. He glanced over his shoulder and nodded understandingly at Priestley as he crossed the threshold of the bedroom door with his half-conscious burden.

Three days had passed in the search for the missing boy. In them Dunham had borne at least the burden of his bodily presence. Three more were to slip by in which Priestley carried on the blind hunt alone. Dunham lay in Christopher's

bed with darkened windows through which came a faint light and the subdued sounds of the life that ebbed and flowed, feverishly or gayly or stolidly, in the street outside. Sometimes the old man slept with heavy, stertorous breathing. Sometimes he wandered in a dim delirium from which he called with feeble moans for his boy or retraced the steps of their nightmare pilgrimage in search of him. Once or twice broken snatches of sentences told that he had wandered back to the sunlit fields and pastures where he had lived his twenty years of trust-keeping to the dead. More often he spent his waking hours staring with dry eyes at the ceiling, rousing only to give patient, fleeting heed to Wilkins's appeals that he eat or drink or hearken to the doctor for whom the valet had sent. Once he caught the valet's hand as the latter smoothed his pillow.

"He wanted a bicycle, do you remember?" he said.

"Yes, sir," Wilkins answered with the meaningless glibness with which we seek to soothe children and sick people.

"I made him work for it. That was where the trouble began. If I had given it to him freely, as I ought, he would be here now. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir." Even Wilkins, utterly lost as he was to any sense or reason in the old man's words, realized that by some strange jumble of logic he had traced the responsibility back to himself and

perhaps found pleasure in so lifting the burden from Christopher's shoulders. "All my fault," he muttered. "Mine and that woman's." Then he slept again.

Meanwhile Priestley was sounding all the depths of the city's underworld in his endeavor to happen upon Christopher's wandering footsteps. It was to his credit that he could not find his way alone in those charnel houses of the living, the abodes of burned-out souls, that he visited now. A grizzled ex-sergeant of police was at his elbow constantly to guide his feet and to provide the show of authority before which locked doors swung open and unfriendly lips spoke truthfully for once in their lives. They even seemed strangely eager to aid him in his search sometimes, these vultures and victims of the city's lust and greed. From minds that had not harbored a manly or a womanly thought for years came shrewd suggestions, bred of a hard-bought knowledge of the city's filthy, miry byways. Voices that had spoken curses more often than kind words wished him success in his efforts, and more than once he was assured that he would be made aware of any knowledge of the boy which might appear later. Priestley was touched by these unexpected evidences of good will from such sources. It was as though the fragrance of a lily had suddenly arisen from some festering heap of mortal corruption, but as he passed on he found himself echoing Dunham's hope to find the boy dead rather than living so.

And he did not find him. Once or twice a moment's hesitation, a closer questioning on the part of the questioned, inspired him with the mingled hope and fear that he was nearing the end of the trail. But it was vain. Recklessness, not despair, was evidently the guiding star of the erring youngster the recollection of whom suggested a possible Christopher. At the end of Priestley's three days of groping in the moral sewers of the city, a groping that left him physically broken and mentally and morally nauseated, Christopher was as hopelessly lost as at the beginning. More even, for as the possibilities were exhausted one by one, the hope of alighting at last upon the chance that should blossom forth into fact receded farther from him.

"It's like trying to find a needle in haystack when it's so dark you can't see the haystack," he said fretfully to the grizzled ex-sergeant of police as he dismissed his guide on the morning which beheld him finally at the end of his resources. So exhausted was he in every bone and muscle and nerve, every cell it seemed, that he was no longer capable of the depths of despair and helplessness that he had sounded in the earlier stages of his search. His feeling was more the impatient irritation that one directs toward the petty ills of life, a dunning creditor, uncomfortable shoes, a tardy friend. Every square inch of his bodily tissue cried out for rest and groaned at the labor of even the few steps from the curb to Christopher's

rooms. He made his curt report of failure to Wilkins at the door and dragged himself off to his club.

Three hours later he was called from the deadness of his slumber to answer the telephone. Through the mist of sleep that still enwrapped his brain he heard the voice of the faithful Wilkins. The valet's first words jarred him wide awake.

"Mr. Christopher's been found, sir. Mr. Dunham wants you to come over at once."

And this was the way it happened.

CHAPTER XX

MARIE'S SECOND RENUNCIATION

TWO hours after Priestley's message of failure had reached him through Wilkins, Dunham rose from his bed for the first time in three days. There is a hope, as there is an energy, bred of despair. The last survivor of a forlorn stand, fighting for his life with desperate naked hands, outnumbered, overborne, dying almost, is not without a glimmering, far-off vision of the safety to which he may win by some wondrous miracle of courage or divine mercy. Something like this and not their stout hearts alone must have sustained Travis and his men in the last days of the Alamo and led Franklin's little company forward till the Arctic cold that beleaguered them moved in upon their last defense.

Probably in such a case age outlasts youth. Young men for the shock of action, but old men for the sad campaign of enduring patience. When Priestley tumbled into his bed, too tired to care whether it was a downy mattress or a fiery gridiron that received him, he was conscious that he had done his best and all that he could do. Not even the thought of Alice waiting with sick heart for the lifting of the curse from her love

could spur him to further effort. Though he had known that John Christopher lay at peril of his life in the blackest den of infamy in the whole infamous city, he could have stirred neither hand nor foot to go to him.

One horse runs till he tires; another till he drops. Priestley was of the former, and though he had gone far and well, his will was not the whip to flog his spent body to the final ounce of effort that he knew it held. He had done his best and he slept, forgetful of to-morrow, careless though a thousand to-morrows hammered at his door.

For Dunham there could be no to-morrow without his boy. His weaker body had broken first under the unaccustomed strain of these first three days, but as strength returned to him, his will cried for action. He might break again — probably would — but as long as life remained to him he would not give over the search, until the knowledge grew beyond doubt that searching was useless. They had beaten all the copses of the city where a stricken man might hide himself away. Very well, he would try the virtue of patience. If the game will not stay for the hunter to find it, sometimes it will come for him if he but waits. He would wait then, and if John Christopher's feet turned back to their accustomed ways, he would find the old man there.

Despite Wilkins's objections and prophecies of evil, Dunham insisted on dressing and taking his seat in an armchair by the window where a long

shaft of sunlight fell across his knees and he could watch the street crossing below. Should the prodigal return that way, he would see him while he was yet afar off and run to him as well as his feeble strength would permit.

He was sitting so when the girl came. There was a ring at the bell, a few low words between Wilkins and the disturber of their peace, and then a quick outburst in a feminine voice.

"Get out of the way, you chump! I want to see someone I can talk sense to, I tell you. I don't tell the story of my life to —Oh!" The owner of the voice was fairly in the room and saw the figure in the armchair by the window. "Oh, excuse me," she said stammeringly. "I didn't see you — I — I —"

Dunham's gaze traveled over her from head to foot. Something tantalizingly familiar in the look of her held his attention. Her dress was the near-smart tailor-made that one may see on every street of every city in the United States, but the hat could be found only on Broadway — or lately from it. Below it was an oval face with a pretty, discontented mouth, a tip-tilted nose, and wide eyes set within a heavy dark line. A mass of red hair showed under the wide brim of the impossible hat, and it was upon this auburn frame to the face that Dunham's eyes rested as though to find the answer to the question of familiarity that mocked and eluded him.

"You wish to see me?" he asked.

"Yes, it's about Mr. Dunham — Mr. Christopher he calls himself now. He wants to see you."

Her quietness cloaked the momentousness of her words for a moment.

"Wants to see me," the old man repeated dully as though it were a matter of no great weight. Then he turned in his chair, clutching its arm with both his hands as the meaning of her words struck home.

"Then you've found him!" He leaped to his feet, his weakness gone as a discarded garment is flung aside. "Where is he? How did you find him? How is he? Ill? Well? Can't you speak, girl?"

"He's in my flat. Don't worry; he's all right, but he's been off his head — crazy as a bug."

Dunham strode toward her and flung the weight of his hands upon her shoulders. "In your flat! How did he come there? Who are you? Surely I know you."

The girl soothed him with gentle pats on his quivering arm. "It's all right now. Just sit down and I'll tell you about it. Sure you know me. You ought to anyway. I'm Marie Lenholme — or I used to be. Elise Everett's the name I use now."

Lenholme! With the name Dunham visualized that other scene in which the two had figured, the dreary, stuffy, tawdry hotel room, the love-sick, chivalrous fool of a boy who waited in the dark hall outside, while he told this bright-eyed, auburn-

crowned girl that she must cut the bonds of love with the knife of scorn for the boy's sake. She had given up the boy then and she had brought him back now. But had she brought him back? There was suspicion as well as relief and hope in the look he gave her as he turned back to his chair.

"There, that's the idea," he heard her say. "Now I'll sit here and tell you all about it. Last week — a week ago to-morrow it was — Sadie and I were beating it for home — Sadie's the girl who lives with me, you know." Dunham nodded in grave acknowledgment of this information, "when who should come bursting out of a gin mill on Forty-second Street but your son, Mr.— Mr. Christopher. Down he went kerplunk across the curb. 'Another mother's hope gone wrong,' says Sadie and was for going on by. But not me. I'm the original friend in need — a headliner in The Good Samaritan. I only got a glimpse of his face as he did the running broad dive across the sidewalk, but there was something about it that looked natural to me at that. 'You and I have met before,' thinks I, and I hauled him over so I could see his face, not thinking for a minute where or who or how. But the minute I got a good look at him I knew him. 'Catch hold here,' I says to Sadie. 'Friend of yours?' says Sadie with a sniff. She's all right when you know her, but she's harder to know than some people think.

"'Never mind about the friend part of it,' I

said, 'just pretend that this is little Tottie's lost lamb and I'm the boy with the crook and call a cab.' "

" 'You'll be the boy with the crook all right, if you go round fishing drunks out of the gutter,' says Sadie, but she called the cab.

" Cabbie helped us roll him in and get him upstairs to our cheerful, vine-clad cot, where he is this minute. When he woke up next morning he was off his head, a million miles away and still going. It wasn't just a plain case of drunk you see. Someone had got to him with the dope — probably touched him for his watch and roll, too. If it hadn't been nothing but booze he'd have come around in a day or two, but this was poison, no less. I knew who he used to be but I didn't know what pew he belonged in and his cards didn't give his number. I think he'd been emptying his pockets around pretty carelessly and when we got to him they was clear empty. Of course, he couldn't tell us anything except nonsense about dad and the mills and Walcott and somebody named Eve and somebody else that seemed to answer to the name of Alice. Now and then he'd break the news to us that he was going to the devil and if we would excuse him he'd be on his way.

" This morning he came out of it and told me the story of his life — at least, enough to send me around here hotfoot. I didn't know I'd find you here, and I guess he didn't either. And that's my tale of woe."

She thrust back the straying tangles of red hair beneath her broad hat and tugged complacently at the tops of her long gloves. She had carried her message to Garcia, and in her mind the next move was Garcia's.

Dunham called for the faithful Wilkins. "Telephone for Mr. Priestley and get my hat and coat," he said. "Mr. Christopher has been found and we're going for him." He was on fire with energy now and the staid Wilkins's quick strides to the telephone would have been a leap in any other man.

The girl eyed the excited men with irritating calmness and rocked easily in her chair. "Take your time," she said. "He won't run away again, I guess. He's had enough to hold him till we get there anyway. Sadie's standing watch, and it'll take something better than a week-kneed convalescent to get by her. There's no hurry."

"Hurry! Hurry!" Dunham's thoughts whirled back to the three-days' delirium through which he had passed and the three days of inaction that had been worse than death. "If you knew what I've been through — what I've suffered — you wouldn't talk of hurry. I want to see him — to touch him — to know that I've found him."

"I guess that's right, too," said the girl with quick sympathy. "I forgot that I knew where he was all the time. Besides I've never lost any men. It's usually the other way round, I've found."

The man paused in his restless pacing to and fro and looked at her with understanding in his eyes. "I don't believe I thanked you," he said contritely.

"Oh, that's all right. Call it square. You sort of had something coming to you from me anyway."

"I don't understand," wonderingly.

"No? Well, I don't suppose I can make you see it, but it's something like this. I've always had things handed to me wrong end first. I ain't kicking, but I'm one of the fellows who always has to fill his hand out of the discard. Stage people aren't much at best, and mighty few of us ever get near enough to even wave our hands at the best. When a girl has been knocking around the country ever since she can remember, wearing out her shoes between cheap hotels and cheaper theaters, dividing her time between trying to make audiences believe she's as good as she's advertised and giving street-corner loafers and traveling men to understand that she ain't as bad as they think she is, she gets a mighty low opinion of the human race in general.

"So you see when I ran across someone who treated me as though I was real human, I put your names in my Hall of Fame. So far as I remember at this moment, they're about the only ones there. The boy was a nice kid and he made me feel like a first-class imitation of the really, truly, only girl, and I believe he thought I was,

for a little while." She paused and glanced at Dunham a trifle wistfully.

"Then you came along," she went on, "and told me how it was — no talk about money, no threats, no give-me-back-my-boy business, but just plain, straight talk. 'The boy is needed elsewhere,' you said. 'All right. I won't detain him,' said I, just like that. Then I handed him a stiff one or two and he toddled back to his books.

"Twasn't much, but you two were white and I saw it was up to me to draw the color line, and I did. Women are fools, anyway," with easy contempt in her tone, "and if men only knew it, the best way to get around 'em is to go straight at 'em. How long have we got to wait?"

Dunham courteously forbore to remind her that it was she and not he who had derided haste. Before he could think of anything else with which to bridge over the gap in the conversation that her question had made, Priestley entered the room followed by the faithful Wilkins. At Priestley's coming the girl perceptibly withdrew into herself. With Dunham she had been easy, natural, almost girlish at times. He was of the vulture sex, to be sure, but her good sense told her that in this man at least the vulture instinct was dead — had never lived. The younger man had the dress and manner, the attitude of the bird of prey, and her spirit cowered and froze. Perhaps she resented too the quick appraisal of look and tone with which he acknowledged Dunham's introduction.

"Miss — Miss —"

"Everett," the girl prompted him coldly.

"Thank you. Miss Everett has found my boy," the old man said in a quiet tone that contrasted oddly with the heat and anguish of his feeling during his days of search with Priestley.

The latter bowed. "I gathered from Wilkins's message that he had been found, although I was naturally not aware of Miss Everett's share in it. How — how is he? Well?" His question was directed to the girl, at least she took it up.

"He will be in a day or two."

"Will be? Then he has not been?" His eyes probed the girl for an answer to a question he had not asked.

Her response was cold, with a hint of anger, like lamplight on snow. "I said he'd be all right in a day or two. Ask your friend for the rest. He knows all I know."

"Ah, exactly." Priestley's tone suggested the lifted eyebrow and the coldly speculative monocle.

Dunham's impatience was rising again. "The story can wait. The substance of it is that this young lady found Christopher — John I mean, on the street — er — helpless, and took him to her house and has cared for him all these days that we have been searching. We are in her debt forever and shall remember it forever. But now — now — I must go to him — take him away."

He turned to Wilkins. "Where is my hat? I must go at once."

Strength had come as wakefulness to the sleeper suddenly aroused. He spoke with the voice of confidence and his step had in it no suggestion of the years that had oppressed him a short hour before.

"We will go, of course, but what then?" Priestley alone dared think of the possibilities the future might hold.

"We can decide that when we see him."

The old man's thoughts were still on the darkness from which his boy had so strangely, so miraculously, appeared. He had been borne across the chasm and the bridges to come had no terrors for him. Hurry! Hurry! He's found! He's found! pounded in his brain, and he burned to devour the way that lay between him and his boy.

They found the boy barely two blocks away from the restaurant where he had taken his plunge into oblivion. Yet he had been as thoroughly lost as though he had put the diameter of the earth between himself and those who sought him; more even, for in what desert place may strangers come and go as unremarked as in the populated wilderness of a city? As men have been known to wander all night lost in a blizzard, traveling a circle within whose circumference lie the buildings, the barns, the yards, of home, so John Christopher's orbit of despair had lain across and among the paths that his feet had trodden in the days of his sanity, and the haven to which his Good

Samaritan of the soiled garments had borne him was little more than a loud cry from the rooms where the man who mourned him as one lost lay helpless and hopeless.

They found the boy penitent but with few words of welcome. The meeting of the two was brief and commonplace. "Hello, dad," was John's feeble greeting, and "Well, son," the man's response. But Dunham gripped the loved hand hard, and there were tears in the boy's eyes as he turned his head on the pillow and fought for control. "Oh, dad, dad, I've been such a fool, and I've made a mess of everything."

"That's all right, son. There's nothing so bad it can't be mended."

John might have been a boy of ten mourning over a foundered pony and Dunham a kind-hearted, indulgent father consoling him with the promise of another. Sadie who witnessed the whole scene from the doorway, where she resolutely remained, in spite of the other girl's tugs at her skirt, was distinctly and audibly disappointed. Her sense of the melodramatic craved the tragedy of action, tears of repentance, moans of contrition, confession that would burn and sear, consolation that should descend upon the sinner like rain upon a thirsty, sun-parched field.

"What do you think of that?" she grumbled. "About as exciting as an afternoon tea at the Christian Endeavor. 'Hear you've been lost, my son,' 'Yes, father, dear, sit down and have a ciga-

rette,' 'Thanks, I don't care if I do.'" And she lighted a cigarette herself to lend color to her rendition of the Prodigal Son up to date.

"Sadie, you're a fool," said "Elise." "Where do you think you are? This is no Saturday matinée. This is the legitimate, and then some. Give the gentleman that chair. I'm going out. If they want me, tell 'em you don't know where I am. You won't, so it won't be a lie. And listen here!"

She seized her roommate roughly by the shoulder and whispered a curt sentence in her ear. At the door she turned again and fixed a hypnotic glare upon the now speechless Sadie. "Remember what I told you," she flung at her harshly. "If you don't, this happy nest will be minus one of its turtle-doves. Good-by, Mr. Priestley." The farewell was the sole acknowledgment she had given of Priestley's presence in the room, if we bar the whisper and the reference to a chair. Then Sadie and Priestley heard her running down the stairs. Sadie found breath to remark, half audibly, on the uncertainty of the feminine nature as expressed in one Elise Everett, but qualified her criticism by a brief reference to the many good qualities that that young lady possessed. Then she pushed her fingers through her hair, dabbed at her cheeks and nose with a crumpled handkerchief, and prepared to pay Priestley the customary tribute of hospitable conversation.

Fortunately for the recipient of these favors,

the ordeal was brief. Dunham appeared at the door of the bedroom and asked for Elise. Priestley smiled and replied, "She's gone and she told us also that we did not know where she was, both of which statements are true. How's the boy?"

"I'm going to take him away as soon as he's dressed. We're going home to-morrow."

"Home?"

"Yes. Back to Illinois."

It was true. John had solved the problem which Priestley had suggested and which Dunham had refused to see. He had solved it almost with a word. After their first greeting he lay for a long time with his hand still in Dunham's clasp. Then he had raised himself on his elbow and covered the two clasped hands with his free hand.

"Take me home, dad."

"Home, son?"

"Yes, dad, real home. Out of New York. I shall choke here. Take me back where I belong."

And so was that problem disposed of at a stroke.

CHAPTER XXI

BACK HOME

DESPITE his joy over the boy who had been lost and was found and his confidence in the healing power of familiar scenes and faces and the quiet dullness of the commonplace farm life, Dunham had a faint twinge of fear as the train roared across the level prairies that lay between Chicago and the town of Chatham. How would the boy's broken spirit bear this step back into the life that he had quitted with hope in his heart and fledgling ambition busy in his brain? Would it not have been wiser to seek cure among unaccustomed surroundings where there was nothing to speak to him of the dreams that had come to naught, where no vestige remained of the fair structure of his fancy that had faded into thin air at the first touch of reality? The old friends might be as dumb as he prayed they would be, but would not their very faces ask disturbing questions? Might not silence itself cry out the interrogation that was locked behind it?

So the old man questioned within himself as the train rocked and roared across the level prairies. John sat with his face close to the window, elbow on sill and chin in hand, his eyes de-

vouring the semicircle of farms and groves and villages that spun around and past him. He sat on the tire of a great wheel whose hub was at the horizon and whose spokes were fence rows and long lines of willows and maples and queenly elms, dusty country roads and row upon row of corn, green and rustling. The elements of the picture changed places and values, swung and flashed and shifted, but it was the same picture.

And all the while his spirit was whispering Home! Home! Home! His heart was beating it and his pulses thrilled to it. Almost his voice cried it aloud, save that he feared to speak the word lest he break the spell which the spinning landscape was weaving about him. The ragged weeds along the right of way, the muddy creeks where the car wheels roared loudly on the trestle for the flash of a second, the endlessness of the fields of green corn and yellow oats and golden wheat, the little towns with the single shaded street leading back from the depot, all spoke of home, shouted it, sang it, waved it at him with a thousand welcoming banners of blossoms and blades and leaves and tassels.

Presently the country that spun by began to have an aspect of familiarity that was more than similarity of type. Here was a town where he had spent a week's holiday with a classmate. The friend's father was the village butcher and John had thought of him once in the day of his greatness with a slight feeling of amused disgust. The

last of the Christophers foregathering with the son of the village butcher, a Damon of the blood royal linking arms with a Pythias of the blood bovine! As the Limited spurned the town behind them in its flight he thought almost tenderly of that lowly friend and wondered if he had laid aside the gown for the white apron. Then he remembered that there had been talk of the law, and he promised himself that not a week should pass before he had made complete requital for the forgetfulness of a year.

And so they roared on. Here was the last stop before they should reach Chatham. Thirty-five miles of steel to course backward beneath the hurrying wheels and then home! The two travelers had spoken little on the journey. John had been busy with his idle picturing of the past and Dunham with his tormenting fears of the future. Could he have seen the images that appeared and shifted and disappeared in John's brain, he would have bade farewell to his fears. Wise as he was, he was too far from his own youth to realize the therapeutic value of the sentimentally obvious in the youthful mind. Like sensations will produce like results, until years and experience have so clogged and stiffened the machinery of the mind that it no longer reacts instantaneously to the stimulation of familiar sight or sound or smell.

Dunham touched the boy lightly on the arm. "Tired, boy?" he asked.

John turned to him with the first shadow of the

old frank smile his face had worn since they found him in New York.

"Tired of being tired, dad. This makes me want to get out and take off my coat." He waved his hand to the flying fields. "Think I've forgotten how to harness a horse or shock oats? Watch me, dad. You'll have to raise my wages and double the rations inside of a week."

Dunham stared a moment and his fears dwindled. Was this once the white, despairing face that had stared at him from the pillow in the dingy little New York flat? "Wages are high already, son, and hands are hard to get at any price. I may take you at your word."

"I dare you. The man who shocks with me will need to get up early in the morning. Give me two or three innings at Hilda's biscuits and fried chicken and I'll romp around the field like a two-year-old."

It was not the bravado of a beaten soul that spoke in his voice and danced in his eyes. New York with its luring glitter and its damning gayety lay far behind him, farther than the tale the mileposts told. Around him was the prairie, fair in the sunlight, rolling away to the low horizon. This was to-day, yesterday was a sealed book and to-morrow was to be a replica of the old yesterdays, once forgotten, but now more clear to his mental vision than the feverish days that smoldered between.

So the fields spun by and the track unrolled be-

neath the hurrying wheels and dropped narrowing behind them to the bright vanishing point on the horizon. Then houses sprang into view here and there among the fields, thickened and coalesced into the outskirts of a larger town. There was the slow jar of slackening speed, a factory or two appeared with smoke drifting in wreaths from the chimney tops, a tall water-tower slid by, shaded streets with arc lamps swinging at the corners, brakes ground on wheels that clicked and jolted over switch points, air hissed from the brake cylinders as steel eased its clutch on steel, and the wheels came to a stand.

Home, and a hurrying crowd on the platform of a red brick station! Home, and the noon whistles in the shops down the tracks shrieking a clamorous welcome! Home, and familiar faces peered from every window and remembered voices echoed along the platform! Home, and every sight and sound took up the message that had been gathered from the rolling, flying prairie and echoed it to every sense of him! Every avenue to his brain was crowded with it. Every nerve and muscle and cell thrilled and tightened with the recognition of it. It spoke in the grinning face of the hired man who awaited their coming on the platform. The hands suddenly outstretched here and there in surprised pleasure at the unexpected sight of him were eloquent of it.

They drove home through the drowsy heat of the June afternoon and all the way he heard but

the one word. The birds swaying to their own accompaniment in the hedges shrilled it over and over. The ripening grain wafted it to him across the fence rows. It was in the pungent odor of the dusty weeds by the roadside, and the quiet farm-houses sleeping in the sunshine wrapped him about with a delightful, somnolent sense of familiar homeliness. It was the cool, living touch of firm and well-remembered reality, and the last vestiges of the impurity of the city were wiped away as the stains of labor are removed by the cleansing rush of cold water at the end of the day. A year before he had imaged his first return as that of the conquering hero, or of a still vigorous Antæus reclining for a brief period on the familiar earth that he might gather greater strength for the next victorious leap. That vision had faded and for a time the thought of home had been to him first a pleasing background always receding, then a tantalizing dream of joys once known, never to be experienced again. This, too, had been swept away by a great wave of numbing pain.

Dunham, too, had dreamed his dream of the first return in which he had scaled the heights of anticipation and sounded the depths of dread. That very morning he had shrunk from the picture of his boy creeping home, broken and spiritless, hiding from his kind, clanking the chain of recollection at every step, turning and twisting to throw behind him a shadow that would still stretch black and forbidding in front.

All were wrong, hopes, fears, dreads and anticipations, alike. He came as a boy from the tasks of school to his first long vacation, finding a welcome and a promise of pleasure to come in every simple, homely object. A hard-faced farmer waved a cheerful hand from the field, a grinning boy saluted him with respectful cordiality from the jouncing back of a fat Percheron, a shy-faced girl smiled up at him from under the shelter of her sunbonnet. He drew long breaths and stretched tired legs. And all the while his spirit cried Home! Home! Home! to the obligato of jogging hoofs on the hard road.

So it went along the prairie road, over the rolling hills,— past the corner where the little white church recalled sleepy summer Sundays when any sermon, however short, was far too long for restless boyhood; past the country store where two or three overalled and straw-hatted figures waved leisurely hands from the shelter of the porch. Then they turned the last corner, down the rutted road through the woods where oak and hickory drooped in the afternoon sun and squirrels chattered a welcome from their topmost branches. A white farmhouse sprang into sight through the trees with its backing of barns and granaries and yards, a dog ran barking tumultuously to the road gate, the limit of his domain. Hilda swung a rapturous dish-cloth from the kitchen window and the hired man — coachman jumped down to swing back the last barrier.

And that was the home-coming of John Christopher. He had gone forth to conquer; he had come back beaten, but never were waving banners and pealing bells and shouting thousands, arches and flowers and medals of honor, more blessed to returning conqueror than the familiar, commonplace objects of the Illinois farm to this weary boy.

Hilda's supper was all that his reminiscent fancy had painted it, fried chicken, light tea biscuits, cream gravy, cherry pie, and coffee whose very aroma was an odorous tribute to the Brazilian fields from which it claimed descent. The two men lingered over it long and talked carelessly of a hundred things, the marriage of a neighbor's daughter, the coming of a new renter to one of the old farms, the usual small community matters of birth and death, marriage and parting, that make up the sum total of human life on an Illinois farm or crowded city block alike.

The one thing they did not touch upon was the chain of circumstances that had driven John from his newly acquired foothold in New York and made tragedy of the neat society drama he had been busily staging. Dunham waited for the unbosoming that he was sure would come sooner or later. Meanwhile he was well content to see the loved boyish face across the table, to hear the familiar voice, to catch the old trick of the puzzled, frowning smile. If there was to be confession he was ready; if patience was needed, he was

equally prepared. Life had taught him the lesson of wise, mute, unbroken waiting.

John chatted on with easy question and comment after they had left the table and found their old places on the front porch, the man in the creaking rocker, pipe in mouth, and the boy on the step with his back against a post and his chin propped in his hand. So they had sat that evening after the woman by the roadside had troubled the quiet waters of their life; again years later when the boy received the message from his dead father, and times without number in the many summers of their comradeship. Neither was in the mood for mournful memories or the false pathos of introspection that seizes even sane men at times, but there is an atmosphere of familiarity — a spirit of the place — that lulls us into tranquil sadness without our knowledge or consent.

John had asked for news of his old schoolmates. Though little more than a year had elapsed, there had been changes. One had married and followed his humble star to Kansas; another had furnished unending food for laughter by his unavailing efforts to achieve matrimony; a third had forsaken the plough for the sugar scoop and was playing grocer in a neighboring metropolis of five hundred-odd souls, of whom he was not the least odd. Then he asked of a fourth, a misplaced genius, an artist in all save draftsmanship, with the soul of a musician tugging at stiffened fingers, a lad who saw poetry everywhere save on the

paper he smudged with meaningless rhymes. Dunham moved uneasily at the question and John repeated it. The older man stared at his pipe-bowl and groped for words. "He — he went to Chicago, you know. He had a job in the stock-yards."

"Yes, I know. I've often laughed at the thought of poor Joe punching steers into the killing pens and spending his nights dreaming of poetry and pictures and operas and plays. Is he still there?"

"No,— he came back. He came back two months ago."

"Oh, then I shall see him. That's good."

"No, son. You won't see him. He lived only two weeks. His father went up for him. Consumption!"

It was a common enough tragedy. Every little country community knows its like, vague young hopes blasted, mounting ambition falling to earth with crippled wings. It is a tale that is told in the simple brevity of epitaph and pious hope in more than one obscure village of the dead.

Perhaps it was the commonness of the story that hushed the boy's questions and drove the dawning tranquillity from the man's mind. The same thought came to both. Poor Joe's commonplace little drama was an epitome of John's larger tragedy. Both had gone forth to conquer, and both had known the sickness of defeat. Both had come back to the peaceful countryside that had nursed

them, the one to be cradled in lasting rest, the other to seek with what success he dared not forecast for such rest as the uneasy sleeper finds who lies through half the night with wide-open eyes staring at the ceiling.

The man and the boy sat unmoving and dumb. One forbore to press the analogy, the other dared not. But the words with which John broke the silence were a tacit acknowledgment of it none the less. "Shall I tell you what happened in New York, dad?"

"Not unless you want to, son. Tell as much as you like — nothing at all, if you would rather not."

"I think I'd rather tell you everything if you don't mind. You've been mighty good to ask me nothing, and I know you would go on so to the end of both our lives, if you thought I liked that better. That's one reason why I want to tell you. You trust me, I know that," he laid his hand caressingly on the man's knee, "and that's why there must be no secrets between us. Some time the past would rise up and demand an answer. I would rather give it now of my own will."

First he spoke of the delirium that had caught him up and sent him wandering after he overheard Priestley and Alice at Harvey's. "Don't think I'm a drunkard, dad," he said. "I hardly knew the taste of what I bought or one from the other. I wanted to forget, to swamp my thoughts. I remember two or three strange

places and then it was all black. Knockout drops Marie said afterwards."

Dunham nodded his belief in his boy's sobriety. That consideration was so slight that no pledge or protestation was needed.

And then he told the rest of his story, shielding himself not a whit, but sparing Alice as he could. He had been a fool, he said, who thought that he had only to ask and it should be given him. Unable to win the confidence of the men in his own mills, he had dared to dream dreams of industrial empire and see visions of the last of the Christophers on the throne of a modern Cæsar. He spoke much of Walcott and a little of Eve, his daughter, and wondered that it was Eve rather than Alice about whom Dunham asked most questions, when the tale was told.

"She's a brick, all right, but I'm afraid I never quite understood her. At first I thought her a fair stenographer with a bad temper. Then she was a good fellow with a sharp tongue and a habit of asking disturbing questions that you couldn't answer and felt like a fool because you couldn't. The last time I saw her, I wondered if I hadn't missed my guess entirely — she seemed such a clean, wholesome sort, just a pretty, talkable girl, you know, dad, with a man's ability to know what you meant by what you said, without trying to pry out some hidden meaning that you were afraid to speak. I shouldn't be surprised, dad, if my last guess was the right one. She's the

sort of girl you could correspond with without wondering half the time if you ought to stop and the other half if you ought to ask her to marry you in the next letter."

There was little further talk of Doncaster or New York and no attempts to lift the veil and discover what the future held for the Christopher Mills. For the present they were in Walcott's hands and their young lord was safe in the home of his youth with the man who loved him best. Fame, power, the vain pleasures of a foolish world, the love of woman, are all very well, John reflected as he slowly undressed in his old room with the ceiling sloping to the eaves, but not one of them compares with a single touch of the hand from a man who has known you all your life and still trusts and believes in you. The old house, the bare, spotless bedroom, the soft bed whose very sheets gave cool healing in their touch, the grinning hired man, the sadly joyful Hilda, the rolling reaches of prairie, and the broken woodland, and most of all Dunham, the dad who was more than father, surrounded the motherless boy's weary brain with the sense of blissful satisfaction that other home-returning boys have found in motherly love and solicitude.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CALL TO ARMS

THE days slid away into weeks, and the weeks soon mounted to the sum of a month, as John Christopher groped his way back to complete recovery. The false strength that had tightened his muscles and loosened a boyishly boasting tongue on the train had faded with the stimulation of return, and had been succeeded by the lassitude of bodily weakness. Marie Lenholme was right. There had been more than alcohol in one of the glasses his reckless hand had lifted to his lips and the effect of the poison still lingered. For days he was content to lie in the hammock and doze, waking at intervals to stare through the softly stirring lacework of leaves at the sky, where the swallows circled and swung. Bees hummed him to slumber again and the faint fragrance of the flowers in Hilda's garden and the fruity smell of harvest apples hung about him like an odorous benediction. So he rested and awaited the slow return of health.

With his dawning strength came days of restlessness when he tramped through the woods with idle gun on his shoulder and Dunham's dog lurk-

ing at his heels or scouting through the underbrush. In vain did faithful Rover drive scurrying rabbit or chattering squirrel from their household tasks. Even a drumming partridge failed to move the gun from its resting place. Then boy and dog would sit for hours on a shady hillside and gaze off across a little pastured valley, each one busy with his own thoughts or drifting away on the idle wings of dreams.

An old man who had known John as a lad found them lying so one day as he tramped the woods intent on his usual holiday business of following the wild bees to their hidden store. Glad of an excuse to throw aside even such a palpable imitation of labor, the old man laid himself carefully along the moss at John's feet and stretched and yawned luxuriously.

"Hot, ain't it?" he said.

John agreed with a nod.

"Glad to be home again, I reckon?"

John was, and said so.

"Traveling around's all right for them that likes it, but give me old Illinois every time for solid comfort. Stayin' long?"

"As long as they'll keep me, I guess." The old man's ignorance of the cause of John's return preserved his question from suspicion of impertinent curiosity.

"So? Kinda reckoned you might be goin' away ag'in by an' by. Heard som'p'n about your havin' money left you, but I reckon that was a lie.

Most everything you hear nowadays is," commented rustic Diogenes.

John was noncommittal.

"Well, I reckon you don't have to work if you don't want to. Dunham ought to have enough for both of you. I've always had to work for everything I got, and lucky to git it then. How'd you like the East?"

John remembered well the combination of Diogenesian philosophy with a Socratic cracker at the end of the conversational whip which the old man employed and was prepared.

"Pretty well," he answered, still noncommittal.

"Y'ought to be glad to get away. None of your cities in mine. Seen Chicago once. Went up with a load of stock. Stayed two days and had a headache for a week. Only time I ever had it. Man has to be a heap sight fonder of people'n I am to enjoy livin' in town. Town's all right for lawyers an' wimmin an' folks that ain't got nothin' to do but mind other people's business an' keep from gittin' run over, but the country's the place to live in. Town ain't bad for dyin'. Fact, I sh'd think it'd make you kinda glad to get out of it that way. Well, I got to be movin'. So long."

Diogenes rose slowly, easing his creaking joints, and slouched away. John lay back on the mossy bank and pondered. The old man's sententious sophisms were a faint, running accompaniment to his thoughts. The country's the place to live in!

Why not? Wiser men had said the same, and "return to nature" had been the cry of sick experience even before Rousseau. Were they right, these satiated dwellers in the house of Mammon, babbling of green fields seen afar through richly curtained windows as one views a Corot landscape? He was here and the heat and hurry of the city were far away. The experiment was worth trying at least.

It was proof of his returning normality that he could regard his next step as an experiment, rather than as the stride of a victorious leader or the slow retreat of a dust-begrimed straggler. It is worth something to have learned that sometimes we walk on because we must, and not in hope of a far-seen goal toward which we feverishly strive.

To pass his days among the friends of his youth and so to come to the peaceful end of them — could anything be better, more to be desired than that? He had heard of country-bred men whose love had turned back to the country of their youth when they had seen the angel of the great parting stand at the bedside in homes of luxury. Their feet were held — were already chilled in the dark presence — and it was not in their power to follow the mind's leading. Like Falstaff, they prattled feebly a little while of green fields and running brooks, and then were still. They had shut their ears to the cry of the outer world too

long. At the end it was given them to hear it only for a moment before the eternal deafness sealed all hearing.

Why should he try conclusions with the world again? Let those wrestle who valued the prize. He had touched it and found it pinchbeck, and tarnished at that. Like his friend, the old Diogenes of the bees, he was ready to declare "the country's the place to live in." As he strolled homeward through the flickering shade the words of Kingsley's too-prophetic little song came to him and he chanted them slowly in time to his slow steps.

"'When all the world is young, lad,
And all the trees are green;
And every goose a swan, lad,
And every lass a queen;
Then, hey! for boot and horse, lad,
And round the world away.
Young blood must have its course, lad,
And every dog his day.

"'When all the world is old, lad,
And all the trees are brown;
And all the sport is stale, lad,
And all the wheels run down,
Creep home and find your place there,
The spent and maimed among,
God grant you find one face there
You knew when life was young.'"

Was that his case? Not quite, he assured himself. He had crept home spent and maimed, and the wheels had moved but slowly for weeks, but why should not the world grow young again, and the leaves come upon the trees, and the old zest in the sport of living return to him? And how better could this resurrection miracle be performed than by the sight of the perennial rebirth of the world?

A farmer's life was the life for him, and his spirits rose to the mocking level of a rustic parody that he had heard in early boyhood:

I long to be a Granger and with the Grangers stand,
A horny-fisted farmer with a haystack in my hand.

As for the mills — let them flame from their thousand windows, or stand idle, blackened monuments of the achievements of other Christophers. The lines of the last of the name were cast in more pleasant places.

He did not announce his decision to Dunham in words, but his intention was none the less plain and the older man saw it and wondered not a little — and worried, too. Yet he said nothing when he found John in the barn before breakfast next morning busy with the currycomb and brush, whistling a gay accompaniment to the equine toilet he was performing.

"What do you think of your new hired man, dad?" he sang out when he saw Dunham standing in the doorway.

The man answered with a smile. There were many things he did not understand, but his boy's new cheerfulness was too grateful to his heart to admit of doubtful questionings. He was willing to wait for any explanation that might come.

"Think you're up to it, son?" was his interrogative comment.

"Watch me." John's laconic confidence was satisfying enough for even Dunham's doubts. "Once a farmer, always a farmer. Mill hands and girls were beyond me, but I'm the original Hoyle on horses and thistles."

Gus, the *de facto* hired man, grinned his uncomprehending appreciation.

John strode to the back of the stall and smote the grinning Swede with the brush so that the dust flew from man and brush. "We're the boys who can keep up with the machine, eh, Gus? We'll show the old man what real up-to-date oat shocking is, won't we? and drive while he's resting his lazy legs under Hilda's table to boot." He turned back to his work and slapped the sober old horse on her glistening side.

"Good old girl! Will you have a Marcel wave or a plain pompadour? And a little massage and just a dash of powder to hide the wrinkles. Ever hear of a beauty shop, Gus? It's where polite ladies go when they're burning the candle at both ends and want the tallow drippings wiped away. They can't eat their cake and have it too, but they don't need to have indigestion into

the bargain. My metaphors are a little mixed, but that's the way life is — deucedly mixed."

The boy's gayety was a thought too feverish to convince Dunham of its entire genuineness, but he caught what contentment he could from the wave of jollity, and Swedish Gus reënforced him with his cheerful, uncomprehending grin. Then they went to breakfast.

The next fortnight rolled by in the timeless, thought-free way peculiar only to those whose lives run in an even groove of routine. It is said that long-term prisoners soon lose all sense of the lapse of the years. In the unending succession of gray, monotonous days no day or hour of special significance lifts its head above the level rank to say to the prisoner, 'Lo, here you did this," or "Lo, there you thought the other." All sink, alike unmarking and unmarked, into the featureless line of march and are alike forgotten as individual steps of time in the movement toward eternity.

John rose with the sun and followed the whirring, clicking binder in its patient circuit of the narrowing field. Then came the thresher, roaring dully from out its cloud of smoke and dust. In all the labors of the harvest the boy bore his part, and sun and wind soon subdued his white face and soft hands to the tint and something like the hardness of those who accepted the romance of the ripened grain as merely one of the incidents of the season, seizing the grain and missing the

romance. Dunham would have eased the burden of labor to John, but the latter saw the kindly intent and would have none of it.

"Don't worry about me, dad," he said. "I can carry my end of the log. When I can't, I'll put it down and rest."

Questioning glances met him here and there when he first went among his neighbors and old schoolmates who knew something of his story and guessed more than they knew. John received them with a bland indifference — a tacit declaration of his right to the rôle he had chosen to assume, and the glances soon ceased. A few there were who put their questions into words, but the vast anonymity of New York dulled the point of their queries and they were easily turned aside with a vague phrase or two.

He had been with and of them; he had gone away for a season; now he was with them and apparently of them again. That was all they knew and all they needed to know. To argue from the apparent effect to possible causes required a wider knowledge of the available hypotheses than they possessed.

One man there was who stirred his spirit a little and that was George Peyton, friend and antagonist of John's football days. John saw him in Chatham whither he had driven on a hasty harvest-time errand for Dunham. Peyton confronted him with a grin. "How's the young Crœsus?" he demanded. He had heard of his old friend's

fortune but not of the reasons for his return. The spirit of reverence was not in him; therefore he cringed not a whit before John's millions. And John rallied to the challenge in much his old manner. "Turned farmer for a change," he returned. "And what is your present excuse for existing?"

"Hope to be a lawyer in the sweet by and by. Meanwhile I'm half reporter for the *Chronicle* and half typewriter for old man Johnson's real estate emporium down the street. Come in and be measured for a house and lot. In between times I'm reading law with Ed. Wilcox."

John regarded him seriously. Evidently life was still good to this stocky young man despite the bumps in the road. He ventured an opinion.

"Steep price to pay for a place at the bar, isn't it?"

Peyton's grin broadened. "Oh, I'm used to paying. Nobody ever handed me anything yet. It's like football. When you knew the other fellow was pretty near too much for you, you tore into him just that much harder."

A few more stray words of the vague, well-meaning sort that old, long-parted friends fall back upon when each knows that neither is greatly interested in what the other has to say, then they went their separate ways, but John's mind held still a vivid picture of Peyton's good-natured, grinning face and the quiet, fighting will that lay behind it. Body and mind were now in condition

to receive the lesson that Peyton had unwittingly suggested.

The deepening bronze of John's face and the increasing hardness of his hands were an index of this rising tide of health. Antæus had touched the earth and at least found strength to stand fast there if not to rise to new tasks above it. As with his body, so with his mind. The free winds blew out the last vestige of the unholy mists that had clouded it, and the beating rays of the sun burned up the shreds of disordered self-pity and despair.

"There's nothing like it, is there, dad?" he remarked one evening from the depths of the crash roller towel on the back porch as he scrubbed vigorously at a face dyed a deeper hue from the cold water in which he had buried it. "I can work like a horse, eat like a pig, and sleep like a dead man. That's the life for me."

And Dunham wondered that this creature that had burned with ambition and sparkled with high courage little more than a year before should sink so easily into the oxlike round of working, eating, and sleeping — wondered and was disappointed a little, too. Was this the end of the great experiment? In their desire to make a man had he and his David, the boy's father, produced nothing better than an intelligent draft horse, a being with highly trained brains but lacking the will to use them?

The next day brought his answer.

The letter was waiting for John when they came from the fields at noontime. It bore the postmark of Doncaster and the name at the end was Eve Walcott. Two or three letters from the girl's father which had come to John since his return to the farm lay unanswered on his table upstairs. The opening sentence of Eve's letter referred to these:

"I am writing without my father's knowledge," she said. "If he knew, I would not write; he would not allow it, believing as he does that you have deliberately abandoned the mills. I do not believe it; therefore I write. You are needed at Doncaster. Something strange is going on here that my father cannot understand and which is slowly killing him. The men are uneasy and threatening a strike, but no one seems to know the cause. We are paying top wages and the hours are as short as anywhere. Every specific demand has been granted where it was possible. Where that could not be done, father has explained the reason carefully and fully. Still they are uneasy and the strike talk grows louder every day. A newcomer in Doncaster, a man named Elverson, seems to be spreading the discontent, but no one seems to know where he comes from or just why he is here.

"A strike now would make the completion of the contracts on hand by the specified time an impossibility and that and the forfeiture would ruin the mills and probably kill my father. You may

care nothing for the mills or for my father —" she had written "us" there, but the word was half obliterated with an afterthought of hasty pen scratches —" but your place is here. I hope you will pardon me if I write bluntly. I would give my life to save my father from pain and I am so worn with worry that I think I would almost give yours."

John dwelt on that last sentence and pondered its ambiguity. There was little more — only a reiteration of the need for haste and a half-veiled reference to the captain who would stand safe on the shore while his ship drove on the rocks. The signature was firm and clear.

John read the letter twice and tossed it across the table to Dunham. The latter read it in his turn and laid it slowly down.

"Well, son?"

"What do you say, sir?" The boy's tone was even and emotionless, but in his mind was an echo of Peyton's words —" when you knew the other fellow was pretty near too much for you, you tore into him just that much harder."

"I'm waiting for you, my boy. This is the crossroads. You must choose your own way."

"I've chosen, dad. I'm going back. I thought I could be a farmer, but the mills are too strong for me. What a Christopher made a Christopher shall keep with his own hands. If I can't do that, I can at least be in at the death."

That was nearly all they said, but Dunham

saw in the boy's eyes the calm courage of a grown man who sees the odds against him and accepts them unflinchingly. The next day John left for Doncaster, refusing Dunham's offer to accompany him.

CHAPTER XXIII

A BOY BECOMES A MAN

GROWTH is naturally a slow process — a matter of years. Realization of growth attained is often the product of climactic action, a sudden great crash of events. We see ourselves full-statured in the blaze of emergent need, the flare of swift calamity, as the lightning shows us a rock or a tree or a long white line of road, clearly outlined, leaping out of the darkness. Visions of peace and plenty, of power and the fruits of it, may blind our eyes and dull our inward image of ourselves. We wrap our bodies about with comfort, we bind our vigorous limbs with luxury, we give our hands to the eyeless leading of circumstance, and in the end we are indistinguishable from the material of our environment. Then in the flash of a moment, at the stroke of a word, at the fall of one of the multitudinous bludgeons of fate, we stand forth naked but free, beaten but conquerors over our own self-delusions, our bloody heads unbowed and undismayed.

To some this lightning flash of self-knowledge comes too late for more than a single leap of exultation in the midst of ruin. To most it comes not at all; but to a few — and these not always

the greatest and most widely known of men — it is the Gabriel call from the grave of fleshly content or spiritless despair. Given strength still in the long-bound limbs and a single spark among the gray ashes of the brain, and we shall see the figure of a man rise from the graveclothes of habit and put on the garment of reality.

John Christopher had tried the wings of youth, and the fall had nearly crushed the life and hopefulness out of him. He had lain spent and panting, not daring to try his strength as an experimenter whose face is showered with broken glass from an overtried test tube fears to open his eyes lest the darkness testify to the reasonableness of his fear. But little by little his strength came back to him, fed as he was by the springs of comforting routine, and with it, all unknown and unsuspected, came courage. A month earlier Eve's letter would have found him unready and lacking the nerve of body or will to put his hand to the task to which she called him. Two months later it might have been too late to lift him out of the grasp of accustomed circumstance. The moment she struck was the psychological one which is only a hopeful human way of saying that she was lucky. He rose to her call, prepared, not to fly, but to walk, stumble, clutch, fight, anything so that he might show to the world the new John Christopher that he had seen in the illuminating moment her letter had given him.

His reception at the mills was not disappoint-

ing for he had expected nothing; rather his thoughts had been so intent upon the possibilities the Fates might have in store for him that the moment of his arrival on the battlefield was no more to him than any other moment, merely a post along the road which he touched in passing and forgot as he touched it. Another reason for his lack of disappointment lay in the fact that his hard year of wing-testing had left him a dislike for tasting life — not for the taste of it as a lingering after-effect. At the risk of seeming scientific and therefore obscure, one might say that he had become objective rather than subjective, effectively kinetic rather than fruitlessly dynamic. He looked for concrete, measurable results and scorned the feeling within himself of surging power that seemed never to be transmitted to the wheels of the machine.

Outwardly Doncaster was the same as when he had stood upon the station platform a year before. The dusty road lay long and white under the August sun and the tawdry shopfronts and dingy houses huddled at the borders of it. A mile away the mill chimneys flung their banners of smoke against the sky and sumach and maple flamed with red and yellow prophecy of autumn on the mountain side.

The setting of the stage was the same as when he had first seen it, but his eyes, or perhaps his expectations, sensed a new grouping and a strange attitude in the actors. The old station agent came

out with welcome on his lips and a question in his eyes.

"Glad to see you back, Mr. Christopher," said the one and, "What do you think you'll do now that you're here?" asked the other.

Or perhaps it was the uneasiness in John's breast that formed the question, as it endowed the clusters of ragged children in the street and the slatternly women hanging across crazy fences with an almost sinister sense of impending calamity. A year ago he had come as a king into his own, his fancy bright with dreams of welcoming arches, singing, rose-strewing children, and smiling, bowing vassals. That dream had passed and he had lived through a long nightmare, tantalized by the visions of love and the prospect of power, hag-ridden by despair. He had returned to Doncaster with open eyes as the captain steps on board a mutiny-infected ship, fearing the issues but armed in his soul for the sublime test of his manhood.

Eve was alone in the mill office when he entered, bending over the clicking keys of her typewriter. She looked up with a gasp of surprise and the color rose in her face.

"You — you have come?" she said, surprised, annoyed by her embarrassment.

"It looks like it, doesn't it?" John remarked cheerfully. "Will you shake the toil-worn hand of an honest tiller of the soil?"

The girl caught at her self-control sufficiently

to see his outstretched hand and lay her own within it.

"It didn't seem worth while to wire," John continued. "You knew, of course, that I would come as soon as I received your letter, didn't you?"

"I — we — I didn't — we couldn't tell," she stammered, furious that she should still be far from mistress of her own senses and tongue.

"I suppose not." John's tone was quietly contemplative, devoid of all trace of wounded vanity. "I haven't been a very stable quantity, I fancy, but then you know, even a weather-vane points toward the north when the wind is from that direction."

"Then Doncaster is your frozen Arctic?" said the girl with a flash of her old gibing mischief in her eye.

"North, but not frozen. The parallel holds as to lack of knowledge, but it breaks down on the climate. I gathered from your letter that you were being moved daily nearer the Torrid zone. Tell me about it."

He seated himself carelessly and flung his hat on Walcott's desk. The girl demurred at his question and pleaded ignorance.

"Father can tell you better than I," she said.

John eyed her quizzically. "Does he know you expect a visitor?"

The color in her cheeks showed that his play upon the suggestion of a closer intimacy had not

missed her quick understanding, but she answered seriously.

"I told him this morning. He scolded me a little and then, being a man, admitted that I had probably done wisely under the circumstances."

"Wouldn't it have been more manlike if he had waited until the outcome proved the wisdom of the act and then —"

"And then claimed the credit for it himself? Possibly?"

John parried the thrust with a laugh and glowed at the consciousness of a return to the good-natured duello of wits which they had enjoyed once or twice before. Marie Lenholme had appealed rather by her position than by her own personality to his boyish manliness which yearned to give her protection. In Alice Norton his pride had seen a mate for the last of the Christophers and ambition had jogged his elbow and whispered to him that this was love. Eve challenged his sense of superiority and flattered his intellect by her assumption of its existence. There was no thought of love in his mind. As often happens, in coming to the full stature of his manhood, he was unconsciously desirous of standing on tiptoe to raise his head a little above the crowd of human frailties. In bracing his muscles for the shock of battle with his enemies he presented a hardened surface to the touch of his friends.

So though he enjoyed the play of badinage that Eve's remark tempted him to, he shut the eyes of

his mind to the temptation and turned resolutely to the graver business that had drawn him out of his seclusion.

"Who is this man, Elverson, you wrote about?" he asked. "What is he doing here? What do you know about him?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders helplessly, turning up the pink palms of her hands as they lay in her lap. "We know nothing and we suspect — anything. He says that he is a union organizer and he seems able to prove it — at least the men have accepted the proof. But see father. Don't listen to me. I know nothing, really, except what father has told me and the little I have picked up here and there — mostly from the women in their homes."

"Then you go about in the village? Is it safe?"

She favored him with a look of scorn. "I am as safe here as you were on your farm, Mr. Christopher. I was born in Doncaster and I walked the streets of the village when I could scarcely toddle. Their bodies belong to you, Mr. Christopher, but I have their hearts."

John kept his temper under the hard insinuation and answered almost contemplatively: "Then if we could work together, we would have them body and soul. Don't misunderstand me," he protested as he read the interpretation of his words in her rising flush. "I am not asking you to betray your friends, or even to blunt the edge

of their wishes. Their interests are mine; if there needs be any change, I'll make it. If sacrifices are required, let them come from me. You say you have the key to their hearts. Show it to me. My touch cannot be so gentle or so sure as yours, but I believe that I can unlock the door. Oh, I know what you are thinking — that these are fine words —"

"Indeed, indeed, I am not," the girl protested.

"Whether you're thinking it or not, it's true. They *are* fine words, but they will be made true ones if any act of mine can make them so. I have nothing to lose. Practically I stand bereft of my inheritance to-day. The man who confronted me in his office and demanded my father's mills of me offered me what he called an equivalent, and I was fool enough once to think that it might be. Now that it's perhaps too late, I know that there is no equivalent anywhere in the world. My father and my grandfather — those men whose faces hang on the wall there —" and the girl recalled the bitterness with which he had apostrophized the pictured faces once before —" they builded these mills out of their own flesh and blood. These others who are now meditating their own ruin and their fathers and grandfathers before them have put their lives into the mills, too, and I do not mean to stand by and wait for the crash. I'll be neither an unworthy son to sell out nor a coward to run away."

He threw himself back into his chair and drew

his hand across his forehead. "What rot I'm talking. Oh, I mean it right enough, but what a fool you must think me for saying it."

The girl gazed at him curiously, mistily, and her voice was a trifle unsteady. "No, I don't think that — quite. I'm beginning to wonder if I know you."

John's nerve tension found relief in a burst of laughter. "I wonder if you do. I wonder if anyone does. I'll be hanged if I do."

The girl's laugh echoed his relief from the strain and she turned to her typewriter. "We must not forget that I am the secretary of the manager of the Christopher Mills," she said, "with a great pile of correspondence to dispose of before the whistle blows, and that will be in just one hour," she continued, consulting a tiny watch.

John accepted his dismissal with a smile and rose to go. As his hand was on the door knob, the door was flung suddenly open from without and Walcott fairly hurled himself into the room. His jaw was set and his face flamed with passion.

"I swore I'd do it," he shouted. "I told him what he'd get if he showed his dirty face inside the mills."

He strode to the window that looked on the road, elbowing John aside unheedingly. His daughter was at his side, her hand on his arm, her face tender and anxious for this raging father whom she had never before seen anything but calm and firmly placid. He shook off her soft touch,

brushing her out of the way as he had John, blind to everything save the unseen cause of his anger.

"I told him I'd throw him out," he raged on, a ring of triumph sounding through the note of passion. "Now let him call a strike if he wants to. He's felt my fist once and he'll feel it again. By God! we'll see if anyone can stay in these mills when I tell him to go. I threw him out, Eve, threw him out, flat on his back in the road."

He grasped his daughter's arm roughly so that she winced. "There he goes, he and his dog Tray who fetches and carries for him, his man Friday that he keeps to help him do his dirty work."

He pointed through the window with his free hand, leaning forward against the sill till the great bulk of his strong body was half outside the window. The other two followed the line of his shaking finger and saw two men walking hastily away, the one large, broad-shouldered, heavy limbed, an unwieldy giant of a man who swayed from side to side as he walked as though perpetually shouldering his way through a crowd; the other short, scarce shoulder high to his companion, long-armed, short-necked, bullet-headed, short-legged, the trunk of a giant on the legs of a dwarf. The coat of the larger man was gray with dust in patches and spots, as though he had been pelted with soft clods. As the three watched from the window, the two in the road turned their heads

for a backward look at the mills and the larger shook his fist.

"Aye, shake your fist, damn ye," Walcott muttered, his tone still hot with smoldering wrath. "You're a big man, but I'm a better one. Mr. Christopher," he spoke as though conscious all along of John's presence in the room, "you're just in time to see the scoundrel who's trying to ruin your mills and the dirty little beast who's helping him. There they go, and the gallows is hungry for the pair of them."

CHAPTER XXIV

A HITCHING POST WITH A MEMORY

JOHN Christopher saw the two men, the tall swaggerer and the dwarfed giant, again that night. They staggered out of a saloon in the village and the short one reeled against him. Berger was his name, as John had learned from Walcott. The young man stepped aside from the contact with a word of apology for the other's fault. Berger leered at him drunkenly.

"Oh, all right, all right," he hiccoughed. "Want the whole sidewalk, do you? Think you own this town, do you? Say, you looking for trouble?"

He squared around at John, swaying unsteadily on his feet, his hands up in a bearish burlesque of the boxer's attitude.

His companion, Elverson, dragged at his arm. "Come away, you fool! You're the only man who's on a trouble hunt."

John turned away, disgust in look and manner. Berger and Elverson stared after him. "Fresh mutt," was the former's comment, and he repeated his phrase, "Thinks he owns the town."

"He does," remarked a man who had followed

the pair out of the saloon. "That's young Christopher."

"It is, is it?" Elverson said, and Berger cried out in a cracked, rasping bellow that rang down the street, "Hey, come back! You forgot something. There's a punch in the jaw waiting for you back here." And he followed the words with a burst of harsh laughter that ended abruptly when Elverson clapped a dirty, hairy hand over his open mouth.

John swung on down the street without even a backward look, but the bellowing laughter echoed in his ears like diabolical mockery of his own hopes in Doncaster.

His thoughts were bitter and despairing as he strode along the road over the hills to the great house that had been home to the Christophers for two generations and to him for six months. An aged couple were caretakers and he was received with a respect that seemed to his depressed imagination little better than grudging.

"If they had had a dog, it's odds that he'd have bitten me at least three times between the front gate and the door," he grumbled, flinging himself into a chair by an open window. He was still sitting there, his chin in his hand and his pipe cold in his fingers when the female member of his decrepit entourage ushered Walcott into the room. John glanced up without rising.

"Sit down, Mr. Walcott," he said. "I suppose we can have a light," to the aged female.

"Never mind," at Walcott's gesture of dissent. "There does seem to be a certain appropriateness about my sitting in the dark, but I don't want to engulf my friends in it as well."

"It's a good test of friendship, Mr. Christopher, and of other things too. Any bullheaded fool can back a man in the daylight, but a fight in the dark takes nerve."

"I think you mean more than you've said by that, don't you?" John questioned mildly.

"To be frank with you, I do. I was never a hand to beat about the bush. A better educated man or one with a more nimble tongue could tell you what he meant without saying it. I have to talk the way rough men fight, straight from the shoulder.

"When my daughter told me that she had written you to come to Doncaster I admit I was disturbed. You'll pardon me if I speak out?"

"It's what I want." John drew a weary hand across his eyes. "It seems to me that I've heard the truth only from angry men and Miss Walcott in the past year."

"I shall not tell Eve of your comparison. She would not be flattered."

"But she should be," John protested. "To be able to say in simple sincerity to one's friends without breaking the friendship the sort of thing that most of us say only to our enemies in anger is no small art. Go on, Mr. Walcott."

"You must own," the older man pursued, "that

your experience in Doncaster was not exactly — er — er —"

"Fortunate," John prompted.

"Yes, fortunate's the word. Then when I saw you in New York you were bent on this combine that Norton was engineering. I knew that meant disaster to me at least — if not for the mills. After we came back I heard nothing more. For weeks I admit that I half feared to open the mail in the mornings or to look at a newspaper. If it hadn't been for my girl I think I'd have quit, Mr. Christopher — left the post that I've occupied as many years as you have lived. She put new heart into me every day. I used to envy other men their sons when Eve was little, but I got over that long ago. Now I'm only jealous of them because of the fear that one of the young dogs will want to take her away from me some of these days."

Greatly to his surprise John's heart came near missing a beat at this remark. Walcott went on slowly, choosing his words with care.

"The summer dragged along and we were working day and night on the new contracts. Then this man Elverson showed up in town and the first thing I knew a committee from the union informed me that the men at the rolls were due for a raise of ten cents a day. I showed them that we were paying the union scale and they came back at me with the argument that the rush on the new contracts was worth the money. Well, we

chewed it over, all in good humor, and I gave them the raise, thinking that settled it.

"But it didn't. Next thing was a Saturday half-holiday from twelve o'clock on — we'd been working full time. I gave that to everyone except the men on the converters. Then it was something else, more water buckets, a shorter day in the erecting shop, a quarter of an hour more for lunch, lower rents in the company's houses, Heaven knows what they didn't ask for. And they got it all too. Then they struck me for Saturday afternoons off for everybody. I told them that that meant ruin; that if the converters stopped it meant practically the loss of another day, but they wouldn't budge an inch and I began to sweat blood.

"All the time I was looking for the nigger in the woodpile. At last I found him. Elverson was the man, he and Berger. Neither one has ever appeared in any of the conferences, but one day a man dropped a word that made me suspicious. Little by little I picked up the threads and they all lead to Elverson. There they stopped. Who he is or where he comes from I don't know, except that he's an organizer for the union and has the devil's knack of making soot look like snow.

"I went to see him. He was polite enough in a sneering way and informed me that all he sought was the best interests of the men. When I asked him what would become of those interests when

the men were out of a job, he grinned and said he'd cross that bridge when he got to it. I put it to him straight — told him we'd given all that we could — told him that another step backward would take us over the edge of ruin. He grinned like a snarling wolf at that and said that wasn't any of his affair. I lost my temper and cursed him out, told him that if he showed his face inside the mills I'd throw him out.

"To-day was the first time he's tried and I kept my word. That's the situation in a pretty big nutshell. We're at the end of our rope and it's mighty near out of our hands at that. To let it slip another inch means letting go entirely. I said that I was disturbed when Eve told me that she'd written you. That wasn't quite true. Frankly, I had little faith that you could do anything to help out, but I really was a little glad that there was a chance of your being here at the end. It seemed appropriate somehow."

"Like having the relatives at the bedside, eh?" John commented. "But how did you learn my address to write me those other letters?"

"Mr. Dunham wrote me when he took you home. He said that you had been ill and were going back with him to rest."

John shivered a little at the recollection. "Did he tell you that I — what the nature of my illness was?"

"No. Nothing."

Poor old dad! The experience had not been

without shame to him, too, then. "There's one thing more I want to ask you, Mr. Walcott. Have you heard anything more about the combine?"

"Only a stray word or two in the newspapers. It seems to be hanging fire for some reason." Through the darkness John could feel the question in Walcott's quiet words, and he answered as though it had been made explicit.

"I did not go in. The day you left New York I went to Norton and asked him for details. He didn't give me any, but I did succeed in making him lose his temper and I gathered enough from his volleys of abuse to convince me that your fears were well founded. Among other pleasant facts, he informed me that I was a young fool and that he'd see me in a place a good deal hotter than Doncaster before he'd be blocked by me. We did not part friends."

"Thank Heaven for that! And for freedom too. We're fighting in the dark now, but the other would have been like battering against a stone wall."

The aged female appeared at the door. "There's somebody to see you, Mr. Christopher," disapproval on every line of her face.

"Show him in. Who is it?"

A huge figure loomed in the circle of light cast by the lamp the woman held.

"My name's Elverson," a hoarse voice an-

nounced. "I want to see you —" He stopped at sight of Walcott.

"And you don't want to see me," said the latter coolly. The woman placed the lamp on a table at the side of the room and backed out, the last swish of her meager skirts eloquent of her view of the newcomer's unprepossessing face and traitorous breath. Elverson lurched into the room and deposited his great bulk in a chair.

"Whether I want to see you or not is not my own affair, Mr. Walcott, and that's something I don't need any help in looking after."

Whisky had aroused the sleeping dog in the man's temper, but it was a sly dog, truculent but not imprudent.

"I came here for a little talk with Mr. Christopher, being as he's the owner of the mills."

"Mr. Walcott knows everything that I do. You may speak before him."

The giant essayed a sneering smirk in Walcott's direction. "Thanks, awfully," he drawled with mock courtesy, "but I reckon now that the owner's on the job, this thing's too big for mates, or even captains. You'd better listen to me. It may be worth your while."

The effrontery of the man was amazing. John was bewildered by it and groped for words that should be both diplomatic and final. Walcott broke the strain by getting abruptly to his feet. "I'd better go, Mr. Christopher. This man and

I will be at each other's throats before we've been in the same room five minutes." He met Christopher's half-spoken protest with a slight movement of the hand. Elverson saw the gesture and broke in stammeringly:

"None o' that, now! None o' that!" he said. "No listenin' to what I have to say and then runnin' an' tellin'. I've come to you as man to man an' we settle this business or we don't settle it. But it's between us two an' no more. This man jumped me in the mill this afternoon an' that score's still to pay, but you an' me can manage our differences without any conciliation board, I guess. Well, are you goin' or ain't —"

His sentence was cut across by a woman's scream, long and piercing and repeated. John was at the window and tearing the curtains aside before the second note reached their ears. Three times the scream sounded and then came the quick beat of running feet, and fifty yards down the road John caught a quick gleam of something white flying toward the house.

"It's a woman," he shouted, "I see her gown."

He was through the window with a bound and half way to the gate before the others were out of the room. "What is it? What's the matter?" he cried to the running figure, tugging at the latch of the gate. As it swung open the woman was upon him, clutching him by the shoulders, pressing close against him, her body shaking with sobs, her

words crowding out between gasps for breath that seemed almost to choke her.

"He — he tried to kiss me," she gasped. "He sprang — at me — from the side — of the road! I didn't see — him — till he caught me — by the — arm! I felt his — breath — on my face — and then I screamed. Oh, I screamed and ran, I say — where is he? — Don't let him —"

Her voice failed and she clung, trembling and sobbing, to John's shoulders like a frightened child to its father's knees. He soothed her with quieting words and assurances of her safety, unconscious that he was stroking her hair and patting her shoulder clumsily.

Walcott was at his side, and with the first look at the woman's face crushed against John's breast in the starlit darkness, he caught her arm with a cry.

"Eve! Eve! What does this mean? In God's name what has happened? Tell me! Speak!"

He shook her a little roughly, crying her name again, with a reiterated appeal to speak, to tell him what had frightened her. At the sound of his voice, Eve drew back and looked up at John's face, her hands still clutching his shoulders.

"Oh," she gasped in confusion, her hands dropping as she stepped back and rising again to her cheeks, now hot with embarrassment. "Oh, I didn't know — I was so afraid — I didn't mean

—" she stumbled backward in her confusion, fear still showing glimmeringly in her face.

" That's all right, Miss Walcott." John was almost as confused as the girl. " I don't mind — I mean — I — I — anyway." He took the bit in his teeth, " What I mean is that you needn't be ashamed. I realize that I was just a convenient haven of refuge — a sort of a human hitching post for you to tie to. Tell us what frightened you."

At that moment Eve caught sight of Elverson, lowering grimly behind them in the bar of light from the open door. Again the look of fear flashed across her face and she clutched her father's arm with one hand, pointing with the other at Elverson.

" It was he," she cried. John took a long step toward Elverson, wrath in his face. " No — no — not that one," the girl went on. " The other one — Berger! " She shrank against her father, shuddering. The man held her close and soothed her with murmured words and awkward caresses. " There, there, honey," he said. " You're safe now. Tell us what happened."

She told them, through fits of trembling and with gasps of horror at the recollection of the terror that had sprung at her out of the dark. She had walked up the road to meet her father on his way home, fearing no evil along the way that had been to her all her life as secure and peaceful as the quiet of her own room. As she sauntered

along, humming a tune under her breath and watching for the loom of her father's great figure through the darkness ahead of her, a man stepped suddenly from the deeper darkness of the trees at the roadside and spoke to her. On the instant she recognized the evil figure of Berger, the jackal.

Her contemptuously calm reply and her unshrinking courage seemed to inflame his black blood and he had seized her in his ape-like arms. She felt his hot, whisky-poisoned breath on her cheek as he strove to kiss her. Little more was clear to her save that she had beat upon his ugly face with her clenched fists and screamed. Either the scream had shaken his black intent, or his evil passion had ebbed as quickly as it had risen in his sodden brain. A moment later she found herself free, and she had run, screaming as she ran. When John appeared suddenly in her path she had clutched him, unknowing and uncaring who he might be so long as he would deliver her from the fear that spurred her flight.

So much they gathered from her words, and John turned upon Elverson while Walcott still held the trembling girl in his arms.

"You dirty dog!" the young man flung at the giant. "Is this one of your plots? By the Lord, if I thought it was I'd kill you, here and now. What do you know about it? Did you set the other cur on to this?"

Elverson moved a step nearer, heedless of John's clenched fist and threatening face. "Easy

does it, Mr. Christopher," he said quietly. "Hard words break no bones, but sometimes they're as good as a hurry call for an ambulance. If I'd had a hand in this, do you think I'd be waiting here for you to set the dogs on me? You want a flat answer. Here it is. No! I may not be a saint, but I'm no fool, and anyone who wasn't crazy or drunk would know that the man who touched Steve Walcott's daughter had better have a through ticket to the middle of Africa or a nice lot picked out in the family burying ground."

His calm, matter-of-fact statement was unanswerable, but the thought was in John's mind as he glared at Elverson that it was a trifle too smooth, too complete, almost as though it were premeditated.

Elverson went calmly on. "I'll go further. I'll say that if Berger hasn't the sense to cut his stick out of here to-night, I'll see to it that he does it the first thing in the morning, and if he makes a kick, I'll beat his ugly face in with my own two fists. There's no love lost between us two, Mr. Walcott, but I don't stand for no war on women. Can I say fairer?"

Walcott turned his back upon him with a grunt. "I suppose not. Only it'd please me better if you went with him."

Elverson bared his fangs with a grin. "All in good time, Mr. Walcott," he said. "I've got

my work to do before I say good-by. I'll bid you good night."

After he had gone Walcott and John exchanged a commonplace word or two. The situation was too sudden, too fraught with horrible suggestion to permit of calm discussion yet, least of all with Eve standing by. When father and daughter took their leave, refusing John's invitation to spend the night in his house, the girl placed her hand in the young man's with a blush.

"I can't thank you, Mr. Christopher," she said, "but I shan't forget it."

"It was nothing," he answered. "Does a hitching post deserve gratitude?"

But he sat till late in the darkness smoking by the open window and trying to think through the coil of tangled circumstance into which he had stepped. The faint perfume of the late flowers in the old garden that had once been his mother's came in to him and he recalled the delicate fragrance of a girl's hair as it lay against his shoulder, and reflected vaguely that even a human hitching post may remember.

CHAPTER XXV

THE HOUSE IN THE WOODS

EVE'S encounter with Berger was a week in the past, and save for occasional returns of shuddering terror at the recollection of the clutch of his long arms around her waist and the fanning of his hot breath on her cheek, her pulses were beating evenly again. For days she had gone in fear, not venturing alone beyond the limits of house and garden. Her work at the mill had been trusted to other hands and her father had spent every possible moment with her. But a healthy mind will not long be depressed by the weight of fear when the object that inspired it has passed out of sight. Berger had disappeared from Doncaster. Apparently Elverson had kept his word, and the lion stalked abroad bereft of his jackal shadow.

Conditions were rapidly approaching a climax in the mills. No longer was the club of a threatened strike swung visibly before the eyes of Christopher or his manager, but the menace was there, vague, portentous, the more to be feared because it had ceased to take more tangible form than sullen looks and mutterings. The cloud that had

loomed large and dark on the horizon with drumming of distant thunder and sharp gleams of lightning had now overspread the sky and might open at any moment to let loose the flood. But for the moment the cloud only lowered with occasional mutterings and faint gleams.

Late in the afternoon of a hot, close day John and Eve climbed the hill that lifted its woody head above the town across the valley from the home of the Christophers. The village and the mills lay between, and when presently they came into an opening near the summit, the line of the dusty road unrolled below them like a soiled ribbon. The smoke banner drifted lazily away from the tall chimneys of the mill and at irregular intervals a heavier burst lifted the listless cloud and they caught a faint yellowish glimpse of leaping flame through the murk. The sight bore down heavier on the dreary hopelessness that oppressed them both, from which they had hoped to find escape in the hills. With neither was the climb the result of studied purpose. Since his coming John had felt more keenly every day the uselessness of effort — of thought even. When Walcott's age and experience turned back in hopeless bewilderment from the problem that confronted them, his youth and ignorance whispered to him to hoist the white flag or sound the retreat.

Something of this he suggested to Eve as he lay at her feet on the soft moss.

"How can you?" she asked. "Is there a

chance to retreat or surrender? Aren't we in a corner?"

His look thanked her for the loyalty of the "we." "Doesn't that imply that someone is interested in putting us in a corner and keeping us there? Did you mean that?"

"Suppose I did? Can you find an answer to the question?"

He shook his head slowly. "Not even a long guess, unless — but that's impossible. No, it's out of the question."

"What is?"

"The only man I can think of who would have the faintest reason in the world for wishing harm to the Christopher Mills is —" he hesitated.

"Who?" she prompted.

"Marvin, our old rival. Norton told me that Marvin bore a grudge against your father, and moreover our mills were the only ones that stood in the way of his dominating his particular corner of the trade. That was the reason he insisted on your —" he paused, reddening and blundering about for a phrase —"on the Christopher Mills coming into the combination so they would be at the mercy of him and his friends."

Eve gave him a long, close look. "Was that just what you started to say? Didn't you have something else in mind — something which concerned my father?"

He reddened again. "I'm such a clumsy fool

with my tongue," he said. "Perhaps I did mean something else, but it was only a slip."

He dug nervously in the moss with a broken twig. "It isn't polite to pretend to be botanizing when I'm asking questions. Besides I warn you that when I once put you on the witness stand I shall have no mercy. Mr. Christopher, hold up your right hand and be sworn."

He raised his hand obediently, embarrassment written in every line of his face. "Do you solemnly swear, or affirm, that one reason for your refusal to enter the steel combine was not your unwillingness to see my father sacrificed to Marvin's hate after his long years of service?"

The sentence began in gay mockery of the court room, but there was an earnest note in its closing words.

"You can't swear? I knew you couldn't. Oh, I'm beginning to know you in spite of yourself."

She held out her hand as an impulsive boy might and he took it sheepishly. The warm, surrendering clasp of the slender hand was the best praise he had known in many months and he let it slip away reluctantly. It may have been his manifest unwillingness to give her back her hand, or perhaps it was her own thought that caused it, but John saw a tinge of richer coloring in Eve's cheeks and he thought she avoided his gaze. The temptation to follow his suspicion into the depths of her maiden mind with semiserious hints and ques-

tions — a little playing of the lover that should not be all play, perhaps — was strong, but the recollection of an April day a few months back and the agony that had flowed from the sweethearting of that afternoon turned his spirit cold. She caught the change in him and was quick to drop into the cordial, conventionally friendly tone of their ordinary intercourse.

"I'm glad to know it. I only suspected it before."

"Why did you suspect it? I've said nothing," he answered.

"I know you haven't. That's why I suspected. You men blunder along with a reason for every step. A woman's way is much quicker, as well as more pleasant. Three long guesses and one suspicion, and we land plump on the conclusion while the stupid man is feeling for his first step like a blind man crossing a muddy road. We may be wrong sometimes, but even then we have plenty of time to go back and try all over again while the slaves of logic are wondering if twice two is really four, and if so, why."

She broke into soft laughter at the bewilderment in his face.

"Oh, you men, you men! You think you can keep us in the dark by holding the lamp behind your backs. Every time you try it you only throw yourselves into stronger relief. Dad does it, and he's so transparent the light shines right through him. When I want to find out what's

worrying him, I have only to keep still and see what particular subject it is that he is the most careful to treat with elaborate indifference — as you did your refusal to enter the steel combine, Mr. Christopher."

She brought the talk back to him with a suddenness so arch and so characteristic that John laughed at his own discomfiture. His gaze swept the valley below and he became grave again. The girl noted the silence and caught the direction of his look. When he raised his eyes a minute or two later her own were filled with tears. She met the question in his upturned face with a sad little smile.

"Must it end this way?" she asked.

He shook his head gravely, doubtfully. "God knows! The men meet to-night to vote on the strike."

"Will they do it?" The woman in her, experienced as she was in the ways of the mill folk, appealed to the man, young and ignorant of the inflammable humanity of which she spoke.

"It looks bad. The older men are slow and unwilling to act, but the younger men are under Elverson's thumb. I'm told that he has the devil's own tongue and what he says has the weight of union authority behind it. Bind unthinking men with an oath, and they'll go through fire to keep their pledge."

"But it's suicide," she protested.

"Perhaps that only lends glamour to their mad-

ness. When I was in college I could settle all the problems of labor and capital in a phrase. A paragraph purged the world of sin, and a page provided a panacea for all the woes to come. Now I'm inclined to think that the Lord endowed man with reason only that he may prove that he can be the most irrational being in the universe.

"Ah, well, the world won't come to an end, if the mills do stop. There's good reason for believing that the sun will rise to-morrow on schedule time and even the stars may be induced to twinkle a little on clear nights."

"Oh!" She was standing now and stamped her foot in petulant anger. "Oh, I hate to hear such talk! It's the way an old man might speak who was tired of everything and wanted only to go away somewhere and sit in an easy chair and smoke. Why don't you do something? Fight! Beat Elverson! Drive him out of Doncaster!"

His mouth twisted in a wry smile under the heat of her reproaches. "That's easily said. Your father has fought. He threw Elverson out of the mills, but he can't throw him out of town. I think I could fight a thing I could see, but this is not even a shadow that threatens us. It's a cloud and we don't know where it comes from or what makes it. We could fight the devil with fire, but our matches won't light."

He swept his hand toward the valley, heedless that the mounting smoke from the mill chimneys met an echoing darkness of the heavens rising

from behind the ring of hills to the southwest. He spoke, and his tone was bitter.

"Do you think that I have no feeling about the mills down there and what they stand for? They've been your life, but they're more than that to me. They were my father's and my grandfather's before me, and they're slipping away. All that was good and great in the name of Christopher is built into them, and to-morrow mills and name both may be an empty shell. I held a sacred trust and I threw it away. When I came back to retrieve it, it was too late. If I were St. George or an archangel with a flaming sword, I might fight, but I'm only a man and I can't even cry."

He smiled at her and she bit her lips to keep back a sob. "I — I — didn't know," she said brokenly.

"That's all right." His voice was almost cheerful as he scrambled to his feet. "Sweet are the uses of philosophy. When you must go through a graveyard, the least you can do is to whistle. It proves that you have that much breath left at any rate."

A loud clap of thunder broke over them and a drop of rain splashed upon his bare head. He sent a startled glance skyward.

"Jove, we're in for a drenching. Speaking of clouds, how's that for a sample?" Great masses of vapor were rolling up from the southwest, lighter fleeces scudding along below the black

masses that mounted and broke over at the foremost edge like surf on the beach. Behind the black storm waves a wide, livid wall rose and stretched as though to outflank them, lightning playing through it in blinding streams. The sun was almost down and the dusk of twilight was foreshadowed by the gloom of the clouds.

"We can't stay here. We'll be drowned," he urged. "But isn't it great? Where can we go? Is there a house anywhere in reach?"

She remembered a deserted shack farther down the hill and named it in a breath.

"Come!" he caught her hand. "We must run for it. Victory or a good soaking!"

She gathered her skirts in her other hand and ran with him freely, laughing in her haste. The rain was at their heels as they stumbled across the threshold of the shack and the boy turned to shake his fist at the downpour. "Now rain, confound you! We fooled 'em that time, Eve."

Neither noticed the words apparently, and the girl put up her hands to her tumbled hair, panting softly from the run. "When I was a boy we used to call the thunder the devil's potato wagon," he remarked.

"It seems to me that you have a pretty intimate acquaintance with the Prince of Evil from the number of references you have made to him this afternoon," she laughed, patting her hair and smoothing the folds of her skirt.

"The frankness of innocence, I assure you,"

he returned, unabashed. "If I were older and more sophisticated, I should know better than to speak evil of absent friends. I'd know that someone would run and tell and — if you'll allow one more reference to Elverson's patron saint — there'd be the devil to pay."

They stood a while and watched the storm, John leaning against the doorpost so that the rain fell across his feet, and Eve a little more in the shelter of the shack, her eyes on John's face quite as much as on the rain outside. Then as the downpour held on unslackening and the dusk deepened, she turned uneasily to peer into the gloomy corners of the shack.

"Doesn't an empty house feel creepy and sort of inhuman?" she said. "Of course, I don't believe in ghosts, but —"

"But you're always wondering if you won't see one or two," John replied. "A denial that ends with a 'but' is as good as a confession. No one believes in ghosts, but we all fear them. Let's explore the ruined mansion. This way to the family portraits."

He strode across the room, stumbling over what seemed to be an empty box on the way.

"There used to be another room over in that corner somewhere," the girl said, following close at his heels and pretending to clutch at his coat in fear. "Don't you dare run away from me in the winding passage or sneak through any of the secret panels."

John pushed back a crazy door that grated on sagging hinges and they stood looking into what seemed to be a lean-to, built against the side of the shack as an architectural afterthought. In the faint light that filtered in through a single narrow window at the farther end they could see little at first save the bare dirt of the floor and a broken chair against the outer wall. The girl advanced a step into the room and stopped with a gasp.

"What is that in the corner by the window?" she breathed, shrinking against John, her hands clutching his arm. He looked where she pointed and laughed. "Nothing but a blanket," he said. "Did you think it was a ghost?"

She breathed more freely, but held her grasp on his arm, and he stood fast, his thoughts more on the soft hand that held him than on the cause of her fright. Eve's eyes roved about the miserable room.

"There are some dishes and a tin can in the other corner. Do you suppose someone is living here?"

"Some woodchopper, I imagine. No one to be afraid of. I don't believe there's even a ghost," he consoled her.

She shook her head doubtingly. "I am afraid, though. Can't we go? I'd rather be wet in the rain outdoors than dry in here. I feel as though some horrible thing were lurking in these dark corners. Take me away!" Her quick breath was perilously near a sob. John drew her hand

through his arm and turned from the lean-to door into the other room.

One step, and he stopped in his tracks at sight of the short, bow-legged, long-armed figure that stood in the outer doorway. Eve drew in her breath with a stifled scream and John's arm slipped protectingly around her waist. A moment he wondered at the apparition, and then at its snarling "Well!" he knew it for Berger, the dwarfed giant, Elverson's jackal, the thing of horror that had sprung out at Eve from the roadside. Cold fear smote him and then his courage leaped up at thought of the shrinking figure at his side, within the circle of his arm.

He took a step towards the door. "Get out of the way!" he commanded.

"Not yet," the jackal snarled and the falling light glinted on steel in his swinging right hand. "You thought you'd kicked me out of the game, didn't you? Well, I'm back and I hold all the trumps. Shall I lead?"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE JACKAL BECOMES A LION

THE tableau stood for a full minute — John with the girl close in his arm, her eyes wide with horror at what they saw and the fear that the sight smote her with, and the uncouth, misshapen figure in the doorway, hate in his look and death in his hand. Berger was the first to break the pose.

"Thought I'd left town, didn't you?" he sneered, leaning with ostentatious indolence against the doorpost. "Elverson told me all right, and I told Elverson right where he could get off. I stayed to pick my chance, but, Lord, I didn't think it'd fall into my hands like this. Babes in the wood, ain't ye? And I'm the jolly old robin to cover ye with leaves. But there won't be only one of ye under the leaves. The other one's goin' with the robin."

John took one stride nearer the door and stopped. The round ring of the revolver muzzle seemed to him to cover them both, so huge and menacing it appeared.

"Keep your distance!" Berger snarled. "I can think better when I ain't crowded."

"What do you want?" John's voice was slightly hoarse but steady.

"Just a little talk with you and the young lady," said Berger, his tone oily, with a threat under its suavity. "It won't take long. In the first place I want to tell you who I am. You think Elverson's the whole cheese in this business. Well, he ain't. He ain't even one of the holes. I'm the big noise, the whole works, me — Pete Berger!" He tapped his breast lightly with his fingers, a malign, mocking devil peeping from his eyes.

"When I pull the strings Elverson dances, and I'm goin' to pull the last one to-night. To-morrow you'll be nothin' better than a beggar, me laddie buck, with yer high head and yer Christopher pride. But you'll be past carin' by that time."

John felt a quiver run through the girl's body at the sinister phrase and for a second his own heart chilled. But he forced calmness to his tone as he asked: "What is that to me? If your work is done, it's done. Why hold us here? I have done you no harm. Why should you bear a grudge against me?"

"No grudge against you at all, me lad, only you happen to be in my way just now, an' what hinders Pete Berger harms him. I've done what I was paid for, but —"

"What you were paid for?" John's voice leaped to a shout at the words. "The truth at last! Who paid you? Out with it!"

"None of your damned business! An' keep back, will you?" The deadly ring all but touched the young man's breast. John recoiled a step and

Eve swung deftly out of his encircling arm and stepped between them. Her fear was still upon her, but her clean courage beat it down and cleared her mind. She scorned to plead, but her instinct urged her to try what woman's diplomacy might do. Where John's downright mind would have followed the clew that Berger let drop, hers clung to the immediate need of escape.

"You won't hurt us I'm sure, Mr. Berger." She forced herself to wheedle a little despite the sickness of fear in her soul. "I've done you no harm, and I'm sure Mr. Christopher will be willing to let you leave Doncaster untouched."

"He will, will he?" The tiger snarl leaped into his voice again. "That's kind of him. Especially since he can't help himself. I'll go when I get good and damned ready. And you'll go with me."

"What!" John roared, and sprang with the word. Eve flung herself against his breast, holding him with clinging, frantic hands. "No, no! Not that!" she gasped. "Wait! He'll kill you!"

"Look here, you." Berger dropped his indolent pose against the doorpost and turned to face them, leering grinningly and rocking a little on his heels, the instrument of death ready in his hands. "I'm sick of all this gabble about hurting and harming and letting go. You tried to drive me out of town and you sent that big blockhead Elverson to tell me that I could go. You could have

gone free, John Christopher, if you'd kept out of my way. But you're here and here you'll stay. I want the girl and I'm going to have her. Tomorrow she'll be Mrs. Pete Berger or it'll be the worse for her. That much I'll concede."

Eve felt John's muscles tighten for a leap and held him closer, moaning with shut eyes and shuddering limbs.

"And now I'll tell you more," the jackal-tiger went on. "You want to know who paid me to come here and set Elverson to work. It was your friend H. Anisty Norton and much good may the knowledge do you. He hired me because he had reason to know that I'd do what I'm paid for. Your other friend Marvin recommended me. I hired Elverson because he had the union label and I didn't. I knew he'd do as he was bid because I knew enough about him to jug him for good and all if he kicks over the traces. Now you know it, and here's the boy that puts you where you won't use your knowledge."

As he raised his pistol hand, John brushed Eve aside out of range and leaped at him. Through the whirling smoke that gushed from the gaping muzzle, he had a faint consciousness of a white-clad form with widespread arms that threw itself at the hand that held the pistol. His left shoulder felt a hot twinge of pain, as he closed with the leering monster seen dimly through the smoke. The pistol fell to the floor and the two men clenched. John's right hand closed hard on a

hairy throat but his left resisted every effort of his will to bring it to the aid of the clutching right. Two broad, ape-like hands were at his throat bending him back and down.

Red circles danced before his eyes and darkness hovered close. His throat ached and his lungs rasped dry and breathless. He could feel his own grasp slipping and the distorted face close to his wore a twisted grin of triumph. Then something snapped in his brain and he was drowned in darkness. Ages later it seemed — seconds in reality — he drifted back to consciousness and felt again the sharp pain in his throat and lungs. But this time it was the agony of reviving function. He sat up and looked around, fingering his throat gingerly.

Berger's body lay across his legs and at one side stood Eve clutching the still smoking barrel of the pistol. "Is he dead?" she gasped. "I struck him — with this" — she lifted the pistol and gazed at it fearfully — "struck him as hard as I could. Is he dead?"

John found a feeble voice to reply: "Small loss if he is, but his skull is hard. You can't kill such brutes as easily as that." He dragged his legs free and stood up. Blood dripped from his finger tips and he flicked it off with a twitch of his wrist. "He nearly had me — but you saved the day. And you knocked his hand away too, or he'd have killed me sure. You did it all. You —" He stepped toward her and she saw the dark

blood on his white hand. "You're wounded!" she cried.

"Through the shoulder. It's nothing." Then his clearing brain took thought of the confession that Berger's bravado had tempted him to make. "You've saved the mills, too. We've got the secret at last."

"But will they believe it? The strike is to be called to-night."

"They'll have to," the man asserted with a stoutness that belied the burning pain in his shoulder. "If we had other proof — a scrap of writing — a letter — anything to back up our words."

He knelt by Berger's limp body and ran quick, trembling fingers through his pockets. A few crumpled bills, a tobacco pouch, a stump of a pencil, a blackened pipe,— that was all.

"It's no use. We'll have to rely on our unsupported word to carry it off. The chance is a long one, but we had none before."

He gazed doubtfully at the body on the floor. "We can't leave him like this. He's only stunned and any minute he'll come to and be off — or after us. If we had a rope — anything."

He dragged out a handkerchief and fumbled clumsily with his single sound hand. "Let me help you." The girl knelt at his side, brushing back her skirts as though they might soil their whiteness with Berger's foulness. Together they knotted the handkerchief about his hands and tied his feet with a strip torn from Eve's skirt.

The rain had almost ceased and only a low growl of thunder came to them now and again from the eastward as they stepped out from the miserable shack. Water dripped from the leaves and the moist coolness was wine to John's fevered weakness. Together they hurried down the hill, seeking the path by which they had climbed in the heat of the afternoon. Half way he halted and leaned against a tree. The loss of blood was beginning to tell and his brain was light. "I'm — he got — me harder — than — I thought."

He fought for breath for a long time while the girl vainly tried to stop the flow of blood with her wisp of a handkerchief. When they went on again her dress was streaked with red. A hundred yards farther and John stumbled. Eve caught his sound arm and drew it across her shoulders.

"Lean your weight on me," she urged. "You've no idea how strong I am. Dad says I could carry him."

He yielded to her urging and stumbled on. Now the burning pain was forgotten and a great blind purpose to keep on to the end took possession of him. Over and over he repeated, "Keep it up! Keep it up!"

Presently he was repeating the words aloud and she moaned at the sound between gasps for breath. He heard her moans and wondered if they were his own. Then he concluded that they were and reproved himself for his weakness. "You big

baby," he chided. "You're a coward — a woman. No, she's a woman and she's a better man than you are — any day."

So they came to the village road and paused in the light that fell from a flickering arc lamp. A half-grown boy saw them and stood agape at the spectacle of a reeling man led and supported by a hatless, white-faced woman. For the moment he failed to recognize them and raised a jeer at the sight of a drunk in the hands of his bedraggled woman. But the look in Eve's face silenced him and he knew her on the instant.

"Help me," she gasped, "to get him — to the meeting."

The boy fell in on the other side and the three of them made their way down the muddy street toward the hall whose lighted windows showed a block away. John had ceased to spur himself with his voice. Every atom of strength must be saved for the final effort. That much was clear to his brain that reeled with the reeling of his body.

The guards at the door fell back at sight of the young owner of the mills leaning heavily on the shoulder of their manager's daughter, the friend and benefactress of their wives and children.

"Help him inside," she pleaded. "It's life or death. He has something to say that must be said before it's too late."

Eager hands relieved her of her grim-lipped,

white-faced burden, and she passed after the helpers into the hall. No one moved to bar their progress or to protest against this unheard-of invasion of the sanctity of the lodge room until the little procession was half way from the door to the low platform at the other end of the hall. The room was packed, but almost complete silence fell with the coming of John Christopher into it. Two or three men sitting on the aisle even stretched out their hands as though instinctively to aid the two brawny guards who had relieved Eve and her boyish helper at the door. The president of the local union was in the chair, leaning forward, his shaggy-browed eyes frowningly intent on the group in the aisle. Elverson stood by the chairman's table, his arm outstretched with the fist clenched as though to direct the torrent of his eloquence against the invasion. Nearly to the platform the newcomers pierced before a voice was raised against them. Then it was Elverson who spoke:

"What kind of funny business is this?" he cried. "Is this a union meeting or a hospital?"

"Shut up!" growled the burly chairman, loyalty to the Christopher name and blood acting with his curiosity and natural appetite for sensation to prompt his desire for an explanation of this strange spectacle.

Elverson's strident voice brought new stiffness to John's weakening knees and lifted his chin from his breast. His failing powers heard the challenge as a call to battle and he rallied for the last stand.

He mounted to the platform and Elverson fell back before him. Facing the crowded room, his sound arm supporting him on the rickety table the boy drew a deep breath and with an effort of the will that brought a sob from the girl, so terribly was it like the last effort of the dying, he drove the mists from his brain and forced his parching throat and numbing tongue to speech. His voice was husky and toneless, but the words flowed out with scarcely a hesitation or an interval between them. To the girl came the gruesome thought that life had already left him and only the retreating shadow of the will gave to the dead shell vital appearance and power. He began abruptly:

"I have come to prevent a great wrong," he said. "You know me, all of you, John Christopher, the man who was the owner of these mills." Eve caught the strange tense and shuddered at its likeness to the image in her mind. "You are voting to-night on the strike, and you wonder why I am here. There is a man bound hand and foot in the empty shack on the hill yonder who can tell you."

"Berger!" burst from Elverson in a hoarse whisper.

John heard but he did not turn his head. "Yes, Berger. Berger gave me this hole through the shoulder, but before he did it, he went reckless for once in his life and told me the inside history of the strike. He told me because he meant to kill

me and to take away with him the woman who saved me, Eve Walcott. He was crazy mad, but I think he told the truth."

At the reference to Eve a low hum like a growl ran through the room and Elverson started forward at the sound. "What damned nonsense! Berger's in New York. This man's off his head."

"Keep quiet!" from the chairman. "Let's hear him."

John stood motionless with closed eyes till the room was still again. When he went on his voice was weaker than before and its flat monotone was more terrible in its effect than any oratorical mouthings or posturings could have been.

"I know you haven't thought much of me here, but it was my father's place and I had to come back to it. I tried to fill his shoes once and failed. Now by the help of God, I shall not fail." His voice rose a little. "Men of Doncaster, you are being sold, sold by a beast who plots against women, sold by a hulking giant who does the beast's will because he sees the looming shadow of the penitentiary. You call yourselves free men and you are here to-night to prove it. Prove it if you like, and to-morrow a great man in New York will read the news and know that his chosen tools have done their work. He, H. Anisty Norton, the all-powerful, strove to take these mills from me by craft. Failing in that, he has sent these men to accomplish his end by force. So strike if you like. You will be doing his work

for him, playing his cards. You will ruin me, but I'm done already. Perhaps you want to starve, to be slaves and hirelings. Perhaps you're tired of a day's pay for a day's work. Strike, and have done with it. To-morrow sees the Christopher Mills at an end. The great man in New York will have his way, Berger and Elverson will have their blood money, you will have proved your independence, and your wives and children will have — nothing. God help them!"

He swayed on his feet and Eve started forward with a cry of "Catch him!" The burly chairman's arm was about John's waist as he coaxed him to give over speaking. Elverson sauntered with an uneasy assumption of indifference to the front of the platform again, his face blanching at the black looks and deep-toned murmurs that met him. John shook off the roughly gentle clasp of the chairman and leveled his arm at Elverson.

"If you want more proof, look at his face! Look at the cowardly dog-eyes of him! Look at —"

His voice dropped as though the last supporting pillar of his will had snapped. He reeled half around, stretched out his hand blindly for support, fell face downward across the table, and rolled limply to the dusty floor. Eve's scream echoed his fall, and hard upon it came the crash of breaking glass, showing where Elverson made his escape by a rear window as the crowd surged forward upon the platform, eager to succor and to revenge.

CHAPTER XXVII

EVER AFTERWARDS

> "When the mists have rolled in splendor,
> From the beauty of the hills,"

sang Eve softly in the next room and John heard her through the half-open door and turned his head on the pillow. The gray-haired man by his bedside bent forward and laid a hard, brown hand upon the white one on the coverlet that was no whiter than the hand that lay limply on it.

"What is it, son?" he asked gently.

"Nothing, dad, just you — and the mists. Have they really rolled away, I wonder?"

"Yes. All gone, at last. All you have to do now is to get well."

John smiled a little and listened to the low song. "Isn't she great, dad,— the finest ever? I could sing her praises forever."

"And I'd be right here, son, to join in the chorus."

Then they talked a little, John asking few questions and listening in the lax, luxurious indolence of the convalescent to the elder man's words, hearing for the hundredth time the climax of his nightmare night, of Elverson's wild flight through the

darkness down the valley, of the visit that a hundred maddened men had paid to the deserted shack on the hillside, rope in hand, to find it empty with only the crumpled handkerchief and the strip of white linen from Eve's skirt to tell of the sordid jackal-lion whose lair and cage it had been.

"Do you know, dad, I'm glad in a way that Berger and Elverson got off. So long as we couldn't get at the source of power, it seems rather footless to break the wheels it moved."

Dunham glanced at him a little keenly. The future of the mills was still unsettled. The warfare that Norton had promised might break forth at any time and the result might easily be disastrous for the Christopher Mills.

John answered the unspoken question forming in the older man's mind. "We may have to get at the source of that power yet, and Heaven only knows how we shall do it. But we can cross that bridge when we reach it. Just now I feel as though there could be nothing in the future worth worrying over after what we've been through."

Presently he slept and Dunham tiptoed away to find in a long walk ease from the strain that he had borne with Eve and her father since the telegram had summoned him from the Illinois farm two weeks before. On the way out he stopped for a word with Eve who looked up brightly with a question about the patient.

"He's sleeping now. He's past the need of medicine at last, thank Heaven. Plenty of good

food, fresh air and rest are the only cures he needs. Though there may be one thing more."

"And that is?" she asked innocently.

"And that is something that a worn old farmer cannot give, unfortunately. A more gentle and skilled physician is needed to administer it." He smiled quizzically.

Her blush was vivid, but she met his smile bravely. "I believe it isn't professional for a physician to come until he is sent for, is it?" she asked demurely.

"I believe not, but it's well to keep strict office hours when he thinks he's likely to be called in." Then he passed on to the open air.

But when Eve tiptoed in an hour later to see how her patient did, her manner was distant and her face wore a mask of cold friendliness. To John's impatient question as to where she had been keeping herself so many years she made no answer except to lay a letter in his outstretched hand. The address was in a feminine hand and John's look at Eve as she turned away to busy herself very ostentatiously with a window curtain that needed no arranging, was puzzled. Then he tore open the letter. Eve stole a look at him as he lay absorbed in reading the letter which seemed to be a long one, and her mask of indifference quivered a little. It seemed almost as though she resented the coming of the letter.

John read it through and then read it again. Eve tried once or twice to leave the room, but

each time succeeded in remembering some small duty to call her back. Her hand was on the door for what was to be positively her last attempt when John's voice stopped her.

"Listen here, Eve," he had claimed an invalid's privilege of intimacy in the matter of names. "This is from Alice Norton." His heart leaped a little at the unconscious frown, but his thought went back again to the contents of the letter. "She's Alice Priestley now, you know." Eve didn't know it and her face cleared correspondingly. "Want to read her letter?"

Eve didn't and said so, still near the glacial period as to tone. John smiled to himself. "You'd better. There's something in it that concerns us here — the mills and all."

Pride and curiosity battled for a brief moment in Eve's face and curiosity won. She took the letter. As she read her face cleared and a smile dawned and brightened until it was buried in a blush as she read the last page.

"I'm glad she's made friends with her father," she said as she handed the letter back. "But does she mean that he has given up the idea of the steel combination?"

"No. Only postponed it. That fight is still to be made. But we're stronger for it now than we were six months ago — and every day strengthens our position. But it was the last sentence that I wanted you to read." And he read it over to her slowly. "'Carty and I both know now that

only those really dread the future who face it alone.' "

The letter fluttered to the floor as John stretched out his hand for Eve's. "I think perhaps that she suspects — I've hoped lately that you know — Eve." His hand tightened on hers. "I'm not a coward, but I'm afraid of the future — of Norton even — alone. I want you, sweetheart, mills or no mills. Will you marry a hopeless failure?" He smiled in growing confidence.

Eve stooped to him swiftly, kneeling by the bedside. "Not if I marry you."

A minute later she lifted her face and looked at him long.

"Are you afraid now, John?" she asked softly.

John smiled. "Afraid!" he scoffed. "After that, there's no such word as lose. We'll hold Doncaster against the world."

Then he drew her down to him again and Dunham, returned prematurely from his walk, paused for an instant at the half-opened door and turned softly away.

THE END

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